Fairbury History Stories Volume 4

by

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Fairbury History Stories Volume 4
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Foreword

The first settlers in the Fairbury area was Major Darnell south of town in 1829 and the McDowells north of town in 1832. In 1857, the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad installed new tracks which helped to create the village of Fairbury.

This book is a collection of over 70 different carefully researched stories about various aspects of Fairbury history. These stories run the range from the pioneer settlers to modern efforts to preserve Fairbury history.

It is hoped this book will help people better understand the almost 200 years of rich history that helped to define the community of Fairbury.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks go to the Dominy Memorial Library for digitizing the Blade newspaper and making it available online. These archives are the primary source of information for these Fairbury history stories.

Thanks also go to the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Their collection was often used to research and to develop these Fairbury history stories.

Thanks also go to Diane Pawlowski for her assistance in researching the many topics covered in this book

Many thanks also go to Judith K. Wells for proofreading the manuscript.

CHAPTER 1

Book Design

The author began writing Fairbury history stories for the Blade newspaper in 2018. A maximum limit of 1,000 words were placed on these articles by the editor. There was a limit of two photographs or images per article. The vast majority of the articles only used one image to accompany each article.

With the 1,000 word limit, it was impractical to specifically cite each reference source that was used for every article. If the source was the Blade or the Pantagraph, the author often cited the publication and what year the article was found.

For this book, the text that was used in the original Blade article was repeated in this book. If more photographs or images are available for an article, they were added to the content of this book.

Each volume contains about 74 stories previous researched and published in the Fairbury Blade or on FairburyNews.Net.

Most newspaper stories are written such that the first paragraph is designed to grab the reader's attention so they will read the whole article. These history stories are not written in this format. Because these are history stories, they are generally written in chronological order. Often, the family tree of a person back to Europe is the introduction of each story. The author believes this format is less confusing to the reader versus mixing chronological events within a story.

Demise of the Fairbury Blade
Unfortunately, the Fairbury Blade newspaper went out of business in early 2023. The last one of my stories published in the Blade was about Honegger's in the December 2022 issue.

After the Blade was defunct, my new stories started being published on the FairburyNews.Net website in early 2023.

Errors

The author has made every attempt to be as accurate as possible with the data used in this book. Some of this data came from Ancestry.com. The danger of using data from Ancestry.com is that it is often not verifiable to a source document.

In a few cases, readers have pointed out errors in the story when they were originally published. I always go back and correct the story once I verify there was a mistake.

CHAPTER 2

Fairbury Had Electricity by 1890

By the 1880s, electricity began to be used in many towns. Because electricity was new technology in that era, it was unknown whether towns should build publicly owned generators or rely on private industry to provide electricity. The generators were called "light or lighting plants" in those times.

In 1888, Bloomington decided to construct a publicly owned electric light plant. In 1890, Henry Foster built the first lighting plant in Fairbury. Mr. Foster was born in Livingston County and became a country school teacher. Henry Foster then became a teacher in the Pontiac schools.

In 1889, Mr. Foster built Pontiac's first lighting plant. The year 1890 was a busy one for Mr. Foster. He became the Livingston County School Superintendant. Mr. Foster also built Fairbury's first lighting plant. He named his company Foster Bros. The initial location of his power-generating plant has yet to be discovered. Mr. Foster served one term as president of the Illinois Electrical Association.

In 1891, Mr. Foster shut down his first electrical generating plant and built a new one on the west end of the Arcade Block. The Arcade Block started at the southwest corner of Locust and First Streets and extended west. The Blade reported the new lighting plant would take 30 days to construct. During that period, people had to utilize the moon's light.

The 1892 Sanborn Insurance map shows the Foster Bros. electric light plant on the Arcade Block's west end. The plant burned coal which created steam. The steam was then used to drive three dynamos.

In 1894, the Fairbury coal miners threatened to go on strike. Without coal, the electric light plant and the city water works would have to shut down. The city water works burned coal which created steam, and the steam then drove the water pumps. The clay field tile factories would also be shut down. Fortunately, the Walton Bros. coal mine miners ignored their union and did not go on strike.

In 1895, Colfax built a city-owned lighting plant. Besides the street lamps, their lighting plant powered 525 incandescent light bulbs, forty businesses, five halls, and three churches. That same year, Mr. C. C. McDonald of Fairbury built a privately owned lighting plant at Chenoa.

The Foster Bros. electric light plant is shown on the 1898 Sanborn map with the steam boiler producing 80 horsepower to drive three dynamos. The small building had a one-inch diameter hose 25 feet long to fight a fire.

There are often catastrophic accidents until all the "bugs" are worked out with new technology. In 1901, the boiler at the Paxton publicly owned electric light plant blew up and killed the engineer.

In 1910, a possible strike by Fairbury coal miners threatened the lighting plant and the city's drinking water supply. The 1911 Sanborn map shows the lighting plant was still at its exact location at the west end of the Arcade Block.

In 1911, a new boiler was installed at the Foster Bros. electric lighting company. That same year, the Central Illinois Utilities Company was created in Chicago. The new company quickly started supplying electricity to the towns of Chatsworth, Piper City, Forrest, Gilman, Paxton, Milford, Saybrook, Gibson City, Onarga, Watseka, and Arrowsmith.

In 1912, Henry Foster sold his Foster Bros. electric lighting company to the CIUC firm. The Fairbury Plant provided DC electricity to Fairbury and some AC electricity to light homes. Most of the AC power came from a CIUC generating plant in Watseka via high-voltage lines to Fairbury. Also, in 1912, the City of Fairbury granted a 30-year franchise to CIUC. The maximum rate was 10 cents per kilowatt-hour for lighting and eight cents for power.

On the early evening of May 2, 1913, it was dark and rainy at Fairbury. Two 6,600-volt power lines came loose from the pole at a railroad track crossing two miles east of Fairbury. Mr. J. C. Master drove his horse-drawn buggy with Joe Denniwitz from Fairbury to his farm. The two men did not see the downed high-voltage power lines, and the lines touched and

instantly killed the horse. Mr. Master put his hand on the steel buggy wheel when he got out, and he was severely shocked. Mr. Master survived the accident.

In September of 1916, the CIUC lighting plant burned down to the ground on the west end of the Arcade Block in Fairbury. The loss was estimated to be about $9,000. In today's dollars, this amount would be equivalent to $248,000.

After the fire, the city still had electricity for the lights because the alternating current came from Watseka. The Fairbury plant could no longer produce direct current for the local newspapers, two grain elevators, and several other business places.

The Blade had several editorials stating that electricity from Watseka was unreliable and the City of Fairbury should build a publicly owned power plant. A month after the fire in Fairbury, Gibson City voted to create its own municipal power plant. Fairbury Alderman G. R. McCabe and J. T. Wilcox went to Bloomington to review their publicly owned power plant a few months after the fire.

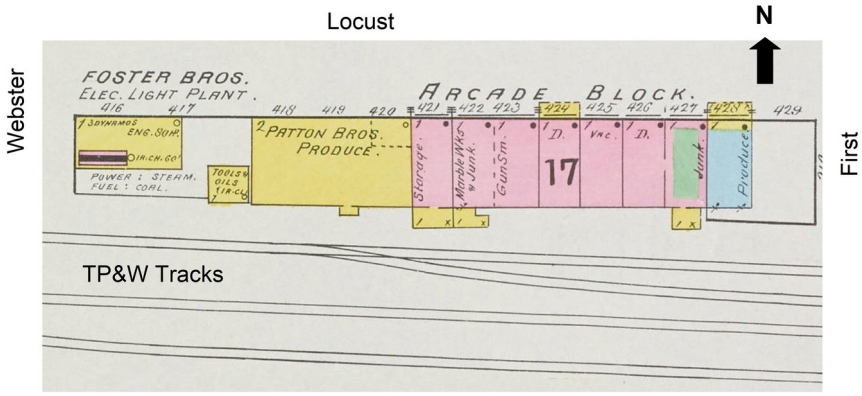
It is believed that after the fire, the CIUC firm installed transformers in Fairbury to create the DC power several businesses needed. In 1918, CIUC published a notice in the Blade that electrical rates would increase. City officials again broached the topic of Fairbury building its own power plant. In an election in 1918, the proposal to build a city-owned power plant was defeated.

The 1924 Sanborn map shows a new small building at the west end of the Arcade Block. Instead of a generator system, the building housed electrical transformers.

The 30-year franchise granted to CIUC in 1912 expired in 1942. In 1940, some city officials raised the option of not renewing the franchise and instead building a city-owned power plant. At this point, the Central Illinois Public Service (CIPS) had taken over the CIUC firm. Officials from CIPS noted that there were over 200 city-owned electric companies at one time. By 1942, there were only 39 cities left that operated their own generating facilities. The CIPS official told the Fairbury City Council the

overall trend was switching to corporate-owned utilities. CIPS promised to reduce rates by $800 if the city would extend the franchise for 50 more years. Fairbury decided not to pursue building its own city-owned electric company.

In 1948, CIPS became a publicly owned company. In 1997, Ameren became the new name for CIPS. Although Fairbury considered building a city-owned electric generating plant several times, private companies have always provided electricity.



The Foster Bros. electric lighting plant was on the west end of the Arcade Block per the 1892 Sanborn Map.

CHAPTER 3

Zimmerman Hardware Popular Store for 51 Years

The Zimmerman hardware store was a popular Fairbury business from 1941 until 1992. The story of the Zimmerman family began with the birth of John Zimmerman Sr. in Baden, Germany, in 1825. The parents of John Zimmerman Sr. were Andreas F. Zimmerman (1793-1841) and Anna Maria Muller (1797-1850).

In 1839, the Andreas and Anna Zimmerman family emigrated from Germany to Butler County, Ohio. This county is 35 miles north of Cincinnati. Son John Zimmerman Sr. was 14 when the family moved to Ohio.

In 1859, John Zimmerman Sr. married Miss Sarah Capp in Butler County. John was 25, and Sarah was 22 when they married. John and Sarah Zimmerman had 12 children.

John and Sarah Zimmerman moved to a farm in Woodford County, Illinois, shortly after marriage. One of the sons of John and Sarah Zimmerman, born in Woodford County, was John A. Zimmerman.

In 1867, John Zimmerman Sr. bought 320 acres of farmland south of Fairbury. He paid $12.50 per acre for this land. This price would be equivalent to $269 in today's dollars. When they moved south of Fairbury, John Sr. was 33, and Sarah was 30. Their son, John A. Zimmerman, was eight years old when they moved to Fairbury.

In 1973, Ben Nussbaum wrote and published a booklet titled "74 Years of South Side Apostolic Christian Church History." Mr. Nussbaum noted that in the late 1860s and early 1870s, an increasing number of families moved into this now-called "South Side" community. Regularly, one began to hear names such as Bittner, Farney, Gerber, Hari, Hartman, Hosterwitz, Nussbaum, Roth, Slagle, Sohn, Sommer, Steffen, Wenger, Yoder, Ziegenhorn, Zimmerman, and others. Services were held in various

members' homes. Nearby Indian Creek served as their baptismal fountain until the church building was erected in 1875

In 1885, John A. Zimmerman married Miss Sarah Hartman. John was 26, and Sarah was 19 when they married. They had ten children and lived on a farm southeast of Fairbury.

In 1886, John and Sarah Zimmerman had a son named Joseph Benjamin Franklin "Joe" Zimmerman. In 1888, John Zimmerman Sr. retired and moved to Fairbury to live with his daughter, Mrs. Samuel Ziegenhorn. Later he lived with his son, John A. Zimmerman.

Joe Zimmerman married Hermina Mueller in Pontiac in 1908. Joe was 21, and Hermina was 19 when they married. Hermina was born in Baden, Germany. They had ten children.

In 1909, Sarah Zimmerman, wife of John Zimmerman Sr., died in Fairbury at age 80. The following year, John Zimmerman Sr. died at the age of 84.

Joe Zimmerman worked at the J. N. Bach Lumber Co. for a few years. In 1910, he took a position in the hardware department of the Walton Department Store. After working 31 years at the Walton Department Store, Joe Zimmerman opened his own hardware store in March 1941. His first store was on the south side of Locust Street, about halfway between Second and Third Streets. Joe sold hardware, including washing machines, refrigerators, stoves, and paint. His store was also a distributor of Shellane Bottle Gas which was propane tanks.

Twelve-year-old son John James Zimmerman worked at his father's hardware store. John J. Zimmerman delivered 100-pound propane tanks to customers, but he was not old enough to drive, so sister Ruth Leona Zimmerman drove the truck. When the hardware store first opened, twenty-two-year-old son Lloyd Zimmerman also worked at the hardware store. In October of 1941, Lloyd enlisted in the Army Air Force. Lloyd served in Italy and received the Meritorious Award. He was discharged in 1945 as a staff sergeant.

In 1944, when John Zimmerman was a sophomore in high school, his father told him he needed full-time help, or he would have to close the

store. John dropped out of high school and went to work full-time at the store.

During the war years, many farmers still needed electricity. These farmers bought stoves, refrigerators, and water heaters powered by propane instead of electricity. John installed these appliances and then periodically delivered replacement propane tanks. One year John delivered 3,900 tanks to customers.

Also, in 1944, Lloyd Zimmerman married Margaret Okey. He was 24, and she was 17 when they married. Lloyd and Margaret Zimmerman had five children. After the war ended, Lloyd returned to work at the store.

In 1950, John J. Zimmerman was getting paid 35 cents an hour. He asked his father for a raise, but he refused to give him a raise. John quit working at the store and went to work for his brother Eugene Zimmerman as a mason for $1.00 per hour. At the end of that summer, Joe offered the same $1 per hour pay, and John returned to the store working for his father.

In 1951, the store moved to the north side of Locust Street, where the former Mapel Brothers harness shop was located at 118 West Locust. This building is now the Once N Again store. In 1952, John married Lois Smith from El Paso. John asked his father for a raise from $40 to $45 weekly, and Joe agreed. Lois worked part-time in the store.

In 1954, Joe Zimmerman died and left the store to his ten children. John and Lloyd continued to run the store. Robert Zimmerman worked at the store after he got out of the Navy.

In the early 1960s, natural gas came to Fairbury, eliminating the need for propane appliances and tanks.

Lloyd Zimmerman retired, and John and Lois Zimmerman continued to operate the store. In 1992, John Zimmerman was 64 years old and ready to retire. After being in business for 51 years, Zimmerman's True Value Hardware Store at 118 West Locust was sold to Robert and Phyllis Hammer.

Lloyd Zimmerman died in 1999 at the age of 79. John Zimmerman passed away in 2012 at the age of 83. Lois Zimmerman died in 2015 at the age of 81.

For over 51 years, Zimmerman's hardware store was one of the most popular businesses in Fairbury. For many years, the only two hardware stores in Fairbury were Zimmerman's store and the hardware department at Walton's Department Store.

Joe Zimmerman (1886-1954), his wife Hermina Mueller (1888-1973) and their sons Ralph and Eugene Zimmerman circa 1915.

Joe Zimmerman in his Fairbury hardware store circa 1950.

CENTRAL ILLINOIS' MOST COMPLETE
HARDWARE — HOUSEWARES — TOOLS — PAINTS

— FOR FINE FURNITURE AT REASONABLE PRICES —
SEALY MATTRESSES • STRATOLOUNGER CHAIRS
BERKLINE CHAIRS • SAMSONITE CHAIRS & LUGGAGE

ZIMMERMAN HARDWARE & FURNITURE

FAIRBURY, ILLINOIS 1967

CHAPTER 4

Fairbury had Telephones by 1897

In July 1896, the Fisher & Hartley company of Goodland, Indiana, obtained a franchise from the City Council to erect and operate a telephone exchange in Fairbury. The telephone charge was to be at most $2.00 per month per dwelling. The exchange was to be in operation within one year. The two-dollar price in 1897 would equal $72.13 in today's dollars.

The 1897 Blade reported that the new telephone exchange would be in Room 19 in the Walton building. Miss Lottie Hanna was the first switchboard operator. A night shift operator would be hired once enough phone lines were installed. Twenty phone lines were installed initially, but they ran out of cables for a while. It was thought that, eventually, there would be 100 phones installed. There was also an effort to run a telephone line from Fairbury to Pontiac.

Sometime before 1901, ownership of the telephone exchange changed to the Peoria & Eastern company. When this firm attempted to get its subscribers to sign a contract to use the telephone for a specified length of time, the Fairbury City Council awarded a franchise to the Fairbury Telephone Company in 1901.

In 1903, Mr. Heald sold the Fairbury Telephone Company to T. R. Voorhees of Fairbury. The Blade estimated the transaction would be completed by December 15, 1903. Before 1910, the telephone exchange was sold to Charles E. Monk of Fairbury and George Monk of Chicago. In 1910, the Monks sold the company to Ray Blaisdell and A. F. Mettee of Pontiac. A third owner was Ammi Lewis of Emington.

In 1914, the Fairbury Telephone Company proposed raising the telephone rates. The Fairbury City Council sued the phone company, saying they had a previous franchise agreement stating the phone bill rate could not exceed $2.00 monthly. The matter went to the newly formed Illinois Commerce Commission. At the ICC hearing, it was noted that Fairbury had 624 stations or phones. About 350 stations were south of Locust Street, and

275 were north of Locust. The ICC had sent a representative to review the equipment of the Fairbury Telephone Company and reported all the equipment was in deplorable condition. The company had received $10,429 in gross income in 1913. This revenue would be equivalent to $316,800 in today's dollars. Phone company owner Ray Blaisdell received an annual salary of $1,800. This salary would be equal to $54,682 in today's dollars.

The ICC ruled that since the ICC group was formed, it had jurisdiction over phone company billing rates, and the City Council did not. The ICC granted the rate increase request but noted further rate increases would only be approved once the Fairbury Telephone Company improved its equipment.

In 1916, Miss Wilma Codlin accepted a position as an operator at the Fairbury telephone exchange. In 1918, the Fairbury telephone company bought the livery barn north of Walton Bros. Co. store on Third Street and began remodeling it. When renovations were completed, the telephone company occupied the front of the building, and the livery part was in the back part of the building.

In 1919, the Blade reported that Doctor G. W. Schelm was now located in the Telephone Exchange Building with a phone number of 593. Mr. Blaisdell attended the Illinois Telephone Association annual convention in Peoria in 1922. He was photographed with a representative of Page & Hill Co. of Minneapolis. The representative explained new checking tools to ensure telephone poles were adequately treated with creosote before installation.

On March 28, 1923, Fairbury experienced one of the worst fires in its history. The Walton building burned to the ground in a massive fire. The small telephone exchange building north of the Walton building was saved. In the audience watching the massive fire was Mr. Ray Blaisdell, owner of the Fairbury Telephone Company. Also watching the fire was Alderman Myron Fuller. Mr. Fuller asked Mr. Blaisdell why the telephone girl did not report the big fire to the waterworks. Mr. Blaisdell replied that he assumed the operator had called the water department as the girls always do when a fire alarm comes in.

Mr. Fuller replied that he had investigated and the girl had not called. Mr. Blaisdell then offered to escort him to the telephone office and ask the telephone girl if she had reached the water department. Mr. Fuller refused to go with Mr. Blaisdell and said he wished the telephone building would burn down also.

Mr. Blaisdell went to the telephone exchange, where the operator was still on duty. She reported she had run the waterworks several times, but no one answered the call. Mr. Blaisdell then checked and found nobody was on duty at the waterworks during the call attempts. Mr. Blaisdell wrote a letter to the Blade editor defending the actions of his switchboard operator.

1927 was the last year the Fairbury Telephone Company was owned by a local citizen. That year, Mr. Blaisdell sold the Fairbury Telephone Company to the Standard Telephone Company in Illinois. Mr. Blaisdell owned both the Fairbury Telephone Company and the Chenoa telephone company. He received $115,000 for selling both phone companies. This sales amount would equal $2 million in today's dollars.

The Standard Telephone Company purchased the telephone companies in 25 small towns in Illinois. The Blade reported that Mr. Blaisdell had moved his phone company to its current location north of the Walton Building before the massive Walton fire on March 28, 1923. Also in the telephone exchange building was G. A. Heckman's tailor shop, the Beach-Wickham Grain Company, several apartments, and a garage.

In 1930, fourteen former employees of the Fairbury telephone exchange threw a bridal shower for Mrs. Reuben Hacker. Former employees of the telephone exchange that attended the shower were Mrs. Ben Huette, Mrs. Ben Peter, and Miss Grace Patterson.

The earliest known Fairbury phone book was published in 1930 and was titled City Directory of Fairbury and Forrest. There were approximately 972 residential phone numbers listed in this directory. The population of Fairbury in 1930 was 2,310. Assuming most households had a married couple, the total number of houses was about 1,150. So 972 homes had a phone out of a total of 1,150 houses. The format of the phone numbers was up to three digits long.

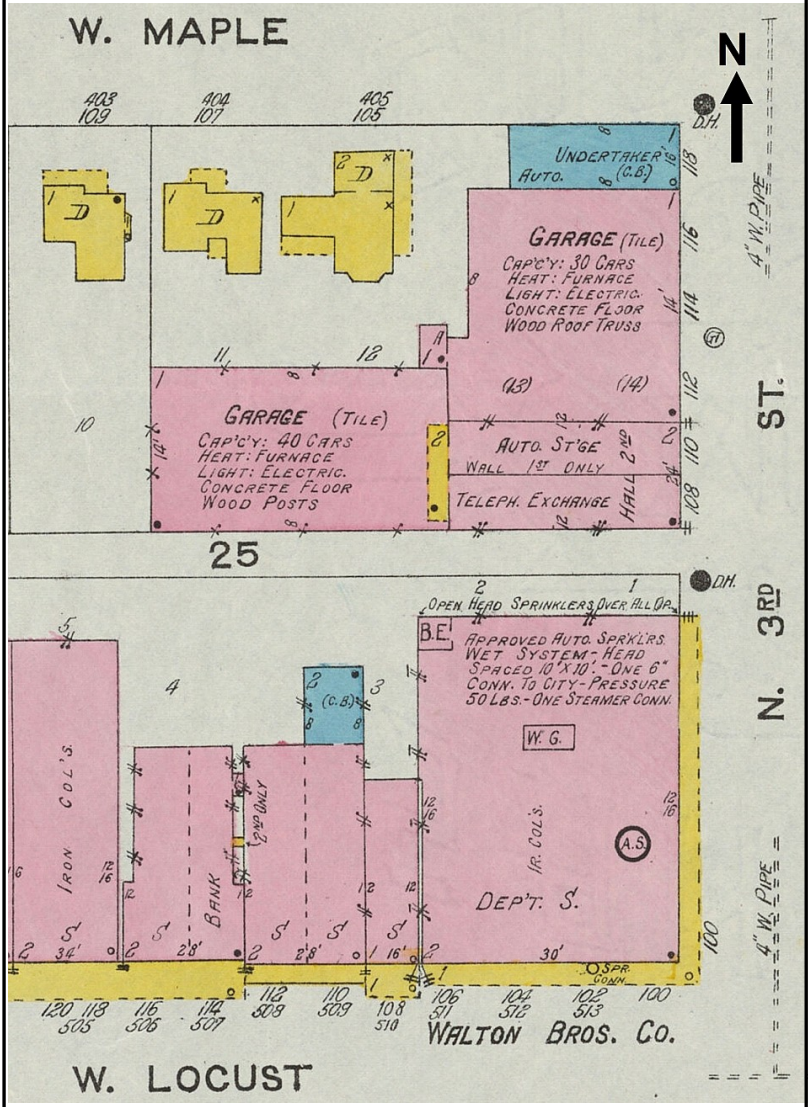
The Fairbury Echoes Museum has copies of 1930, 1940, and several other later years of telephone books. They are valuable in researching family genealogy because they also give the name and street address.

The precise year when human operators were no longer required, is yet to be discovered. Several Fairbury citizens believe this date was around 1960.

In 2000, GTE Corp. merged with Bell Atlantic to become Verizon Communications Inc. Landline service in Fairbury is still provided by Verizon.

For over 60 years, human switchboard operators were required to complete all phone calls. Eventually, digital switches eliminated the need for humans to conduct telephone calls.

Martha Gauger, Mary Hibsch, and Leona Steidinger working as switchboard operators circa 1928 at the telephone exchange north of the Walton Building.



In 1924, the telephone exchange was on North Third Street, just north of the Walton Bros. Co. building.

CHAPTER 5

Fairbury Saloons Played Key Role in Town's Colorful History

Alcohol and religion have been a part of Fairbury's life since the town was founded in late 1857. In 1858, the first buildings erected in the new village included a Methodist church and a tavern.

In 1862, John Marsh and his son Henry Marsh sunk a shaft about one mile west of Fairbury and found coal at a depth of 180 feet. Within a few years, Fairbury had five operating coal mines. Men came to Fairbury from Europe and the American East Coast to find coal mining jobs.

Many factors came together in early Fairbury to make it a wild town. The coal miners worked hard and liked to unwind in a Fairbury saloon. Many farmers and their hired hands would come to town and drink in the Fairbury saloons. Railroad men would also frequent the taverns. Fairbury men liked drinking, fighting, gambling, and racing their horses.

Fairbury also had its West End and East End Feuds. John and Henry Marsh developed the west side of town. Robert Bruce Amsbary was the principal rival of the Marsh's, and he promoted the east side of Fairbury. Each faction matched whatever new feature was added to Fairbury. Each side had a coal mine, a hotel, and a newspaper.

This intense rivalry eventually led to arson. One side would burn down a building on the rival's side of town. The other side would then burn another building in retribution. Many of these activities were fueled by alcohol consumed in Fairbury's saloons.

Fairbury had no minimum drinking age requirements in the early days. The saloons were swarming with boys. Gangs of drunken juveniles infested the whole village. Some of these boys were under ten years of age. They rampaged the streets until late at night and terrorized the inhabitants with their fighting and vandalism.

In 1878, Fairbury had 2,100 citizens and seven saloons. These saloons were operated by T. T. Babcock, Frank Franzen, J. S. Jamison, Ed O'Malley, Joseph Ritemyer, Shepler & Kavanaugh, and Thomas Scouler.

Saloon licensing fees were the Fairbury city government's most significant money source. In 1885, liquor licenses were 86 percent of the city's revenue. The Mayor and City Council members wanted to refrain from passing any laws that might decrease the income received from Fairbury's saloons.

One of the chief reasons for the general atmosphere of lawlessness was society's attitude in the 1880s about drunkards. People reasoned that when a man was drunk, he did not have his normal faculties and did not realize what he was doing. Consequently, he was not to be held accountable for any of his actions during that time. He could kill a man yet go scot-free, whereas a sober man would be hung.

Excessive drinking and alcoholism were chronic problems of that era. Preachers and medical doctors saw the negative impacts on Fairbury families every day. Women felt particularly frustrated at the excessive drinking problem. If a husband drank excessively, the social norms of that era said a woman could not work outside the home to provide for her family. Women also did not have the right to vote. They could not vote to ban alcohol or vote for Prohibitionist politicians.

In the July 30, 1886, edition of the Blade, the Editor scolded both the citizens and politicians of Fairbury. The Editor pointed out that the Village Board took a great deal of tax money from the saloons each year. None of this money was being used to combat the most significant problems that Fairbury was facing. These problems included churches standing vacant, streets growing up in weeds, boys and hoodlums exercising their own home rule, no fire protection system, and no safe public water supply. The Editor thought this situation ought to make all citizens blush with shame.

Fairbury women started temperance movements to fight the problem of excessive drinking. They had massive attendance at their meetings. They recruited Dr. Carrie Shaw, a Chicago women's activist, and evangelist, as the conference's featured speaker.

On one side of the temperance struggles were the saloon owners who profited from patrons buying alcohol in their establishments. The Village Board had to respond to the Fairbury men who voted them into office. The annual fees from the saloons helped to pay for most of the government activities of Fairbury. On the other side of the battle were the women who encountered the ill effects of excessive drinking. Ministers and medical doctors also favored prohibiting alcohol because they saw the negative impacts on Fairbury families. Because women could not yet vote, they would often stage massive anti-alcohol marches on Main Street at election times.

Eventually, the Fairbury Village Board bowed to public pressure and instituted stricter regulation of the saloons. New village ordinances required each saloon keeper to post a three-thousand dollar bond. Each liquor license had a cost of $600, and it could be revoked. Business hours were shortened to opening at 5 AM and closing by 10 PM. The saloons had to be kept reasonably clean, and the windows had to be washed. Clean windows allowed people outside the bar to have a clear view of the establishment's interior. No pool tables or any games of any nature were allowed. No rowdiness was permitted.

Saloon keepers could no longer sell liquor to minors. Boys were no longer allowed in the place nor permitted to carry buckets of beer to their fathers or any other relatives. Worst of all, according to the saloon owners, they were made to close on Sundays.

In 1919, two new amendments to the U.S. Constitution were ratified. The Eighteenth Amendment declared the production, transport, and sale of intoxicating liquors illegal. The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted American women the right to vote. Fourteen years later, in 1933, the Twenty-First Amendment repealed the Eighteenth Amendment, ending the nationwide prohibition of alcohol.

The Karnes and Moran saloon circa 1900. This saloon was located on the north side of Locust Street across from the Post Office. Standing from the left are George Bennett, George Kilbury, and Tom Langabeer. Seated, same order, John Moran, Fred Wright, Tom Scouler, George Franzen, Will Langabeer, Steve Karnes, Frank Moran, and Tom Karnes.

CHAPTER 6

Fairbury Civil War Unit Sent on Indian Expedition

Most Fairbury men who served in the Civil War were in two primary units. The largest unit was the Illinois 129th Infantry Company E. About 103 of the 301 total men who served in the Civil War were in Company E. This unit saw many battles geographically south of Illinois. They fought at Vicksburg and also went down to the state of Mississippi. Company E was assigned to participate in General Sherman's March to the Sea campaign. When the war ended, Company E participated in the two-day military parade in Washington, DC, before returning home to Fairbury.

The second primary unit was the Illinois 3rd Cavalry Company K. About 90 o the 301 total Fairbury men who served in the Civil War went into Company K. This unit also fought at Vicksburg and in Alabama and Mississippi. When General Lee surrendered to General Grant in April 1865, Company K was camped in northwest Mississippi.

When General Lee surrendered, the Fairbury men in Company K were probably thrilled and anxious to be sent home. Instead, in May of 1865, Major General Curtiss ordered the unit to travel to St. Louis. When Company K reached St. Louis, they discovered they were going on a three-month Indian expedition to Minnesota. So instead of being released from the military and going home to their families, these Fairbury men had to remain in the army and travel all the way to Minnesota. It is assumed that many of these men were unhappy about staying in the military.

Three years earlier, in 1862, a powder keg of discontent was growing with the Sioux Indians in Minnesota. Although the Sioux had signed many different treaties with the American government, each treaty was broken by the government. American traders would sell food and other goods to the Sioux on credit. The Sioux were slowly starving to death.

One of these treaties stipulated the Sioux would receive a cash pension from the federal government. Unfortunately, the cash never reached the

Sioux. The money was either stolen by government agents or given to the traders. The traders told the Sioux the new cash just paid for their old credit charges, and therefore, no new money was available.

On August 17, 1862, one young Dakota with a hunting party of three others killed five settlers while on a hunting expedition. That night a council of Dakota decided to attack settlements throughout the Minnesota River valley to try to drive white settlers from the area. This conflict became known as the Dakota War of 1862 or the Sioux Outbreak of 1862. No accurate record exists of how many white total settlers were killed by the Sioux. President Lincoln, in his 2nd annual address, said no fewer than 800 men, women, and children were killed.

By December 1862, the U.S. Army took over 1,000 Dakota Indians as captives. These captives included women, children, older men, and warriors. A total of 498 military trials were held. Many of the accused could not speak English. The accused also had no legal representation, and trials lasted no more than five minutes each. The result of the military trials was that 300 Sioux were condemned to death.

At this point, President Lincoln intervened. He reviewed all 300 death sentence cases. Lincoln decided that only 38 men should be executed. He commuted the death sentences of the other 262 men. On December 26, the day after Christmas in 1862, all 38 Dakota Indians were executed. This event was the largest one-day mass execution ever carried out in American history. After the execution, all Native Americans were removed from Minnesota. This banishment did not end the conflict between the Native Americans and the white settlers.

John Campbell was a half-breed, and his brother, Baptiste Campbell, was one of the 38 men hung in Mankato. He swore vengeance for his brother's death and said he would burn down the city of Mankato in retaliation. In May of 1865, Campbell murdered Andrew J. Jewett, his wife, father, mother, and a hired man named Charles Tyler. Campbell was captured and hung.

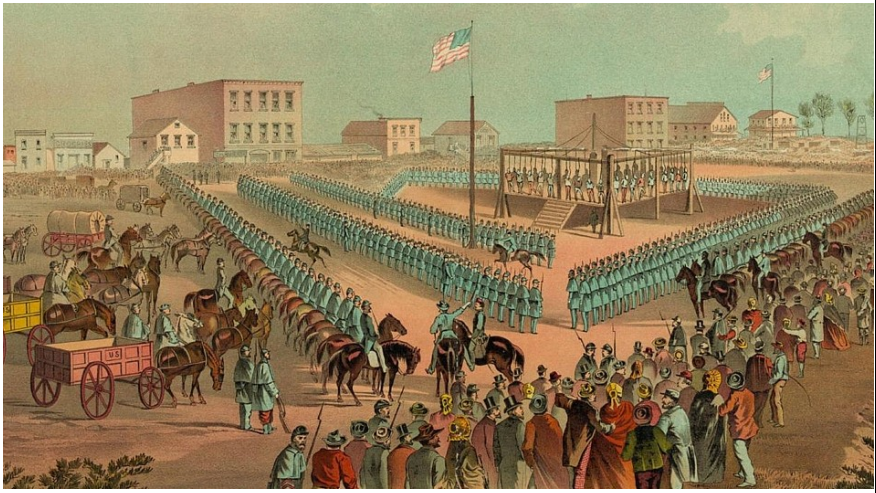
The killing of the Jewett family and other minor uprisings prompted the U.S. Army to launch some expeditions in Minnesota to track down and kill the Sioux in 1865. The Illinois 3rd Cavalry left St. Louis and traveled by two steamboats on the Mississippi River to Fort Snelling at St. Paul, Minnesota. Nine hundred soldiers plus an equal number of horses made the trip.

The St. Paul newspaper recounted that on the same day, the Third Illinois Cavalry arrived in that city, under the influence of intoxicating drinks, members of the organization committed many outrageous acts. These acts likely resulted from the men not being happy about continuing to serve in the military after the Civil War had ended.

The St. Paul newspaper also reported that many of the soldiers in the Third Cavalry were taking "French leave." In that era, "French leave" meant desertion from your military unit. Three members of the Third Cavalry also robbed some local Minnesota citizens. Fortunately, none of the Fairbury men in Company K deserted or got into trouble with the law in St. Paul.

Company K headed west from St. Paul looking for Sioux Indians. They went about 526 miles west of St. Paul all the way to Fort Berthold, North Dakota. This fort was about 150 miles from the Montana border and 100 miles south of Canada. After reaching Fort Berthold, they took a different route back to Fort Snelling in St. Paul. They were paid in St. Paul. The unit then traveled back to Camp Butler in Springfield, Illinois. They mustered out of the military service at Camp Butler in October of 1865.

Minnesota's citizens were unhappy about the Illinois Third Cavalry not encountering any military skirmishes with the Sioux Indians on their three-month campaign. The Fairbury men in Company K were probably relieved they had finally finished their military service and could return to their families in Fairbury.



A special gallows was constructed which could hang 38 people at the same time.

CHAPTER 7

Hit-and-Miss Engines Played Important Role on Fairbury Farms

Around the year 1900, most Fairbury farms had some livestock. This livestock, as well as the farm family members, required water every day. Electric water pumps could not be used to provide water because electricity was not available to farms until the late 1930s. Some farms erected a windmill to pump water from a well if the wind blew. Most farmers relied on hand-operated well pumps to provide water every day.

In the 1880s, the internal combustion engine was being developed. Eventually, these engines would power automobiles and farm tractors in the 20th century. Around 1890, small internal combustion engines were designed for farm use. The standard operating speed for these engines was 600 RPM.

These small engines used a unique method of controlling the motor speed. Most of these small engines had a rotating ball-type speed governor. Two steel balls moved outwards as the speed was increased. The balls were connected to a linkage shaft. If the engine speed were below the set point, the governor linkage would allow the engine to fire normally. When the engine speed exceeded the set point, the governor linkage held the exhaust valve open, preventing a vacuum in the cylinder and causing the intake valve to remain closed, thus interrupting the engine firing mechanism.

The sound made when the engine is running without a load is a distinctive "Snort POP whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh snort POP" as the engine fires and then coasts until the speed decreases and it fires again to maintain its average speed. The snorting is caused by the atmospheric intake valve used on many of these engines. This unique sound is why these engines are often called hit-and-miss engines.

The most popular size of these engines was the one-and-a-half horsepower size. Hundreds of thousands of this size engine were manufactured and

sold in the United States. These engines were available in larger sizes, up to about 12 horsepower.

These small engines were great labor-saving devices for farmers. They were used to pump water, grind feed, and saw wood. The old hand lever-operated water pumps operated best at about one pumping cycle per second or 50 RPM. Most small hit-n-miss engines operated at a much higher speed of 600 RPM. A method was needed to reduce the speed by a factor of 12 for pumping water. A mechanism called a pump jack was invented to solve the problem of reducing the 600 RPM motor speed down to the 50 RPM pump speed. Pump jacks use gears to reduce the speed by the 12:1 ratio needed for pumping water. The pump jacks are connected to the pump rod using wooden or steel linkages.

Farmers could buy a hit-n-miss engine and a pump jack. They could bolt the pump jack onto their existing hand lever-operated water pump. The farmer would remove the hand lever and connect the pump jack to the pumping rod. A flat belt connected the hit-n-miss engine to the pump jack. This setup allowed the farmer to run the engine once or twice daily to provide his livestock with drinking water. Once electricity was finally offered to the farm, the hit-n-miss engine was replaced by an electric motor. A float switch in the water tank would automatically start and stop the electric motor to keep the livestock water tank full.

On one Fairbury farm, the hit-n-miss engine was placed in the basement of a farmhouse and connected to a water pump. Like any internal combustion engine, the motor produces exhaust fumes. These fumes can asphyxiate a human being. To prevent the engine from filling the house with exhaust fumes, the exhaust was piped from the hit-n-miss engine to the outdoors.

The popularity of hit-n-miss engines with farmers prompted Fairbury's Joseph Jesse Slagel (1883-1915) to invent and produce hit-n-miss engines. From when he was a small boy, Joseph was known as a mechanical wizard. He opened his own machine shop at the northwest corner of Sixth and Locust Streets in Fairbury. He named his company the Fairbury Motor Works and manufactured a one-and-a-half horsepower Midget Engine.

In 1911, early Fairbury plumber C.B. Day was featured in a story in the weekly issue of the Metal Worker, Plumber, and Steam Fitter magazine.

He was featured in this trade magazine because of his unique marketing method. At the Fairbury Fair, he set up displays. For the city ladies, he showed the latest in indoor plumbing items. For farmers, he demonstrated easier ways to get water for the farm. He featured water pumps powered by Midget engines from Joseph Slagel's Fairbury Motor Works.

Unfortunately, in 1913 Joseph Slagel started to experience serious health issues. He sold his Fairbury machine shop and moved to New Mexico in 1914. Many early cars used acetylene gas at high pressure to power the headlights. This lighting system was called the Prestolite tank and generator. Joseph owned such a vehicle in New Mexico. In 1915, at 32, Joseph was killed when this pressurized gas system blew up his car. Because these acetylene systems were so dangerous, electric lights replaced them in a few years.

It is unknown how many Midget hit-n-miss engines Joseph Slagel produced at his Fairbury Motor Works. There are five of his engines still in existence. Two are in Fairbury, one is in Strawn, one is in Indiana, and an Iowa collector owns one.

Unlike the scarce Fairbury Midget engines, hundreds of thousands of these hit-n-miss engines were produced by other companies. In the 1910 era, the Big Four manufacturers of his-n-miss engines were Waterloo, Fairbanks-Morse, Hercules, and International Harvester. As an example of how many of these engines were sold, between 1906 and 1923, there was a total of 330,000 Waterloo engines sold.

Thousands of out-of-use hit-n-miss engines were scrapped in the iron and steel drives of World War II—but many survived and have been restored to working order by enthusiasts. Today, one of the commonly manufactured antique hit-n-miss engines in the one-and-a-half horsepower size can be purchased for $500 to $1500. Some of these restored engines are exhibited yearly at the Central States Thresherman's Reunion north of Pontiac. At least two of these common antique engines have been restored by Fairbury citizens.

Hit-n-miss engines are deeply intertwined with Fairbury history. They helped Fairbury farmers to be successful in the 1890 to 1940 time period.

Joseph Slagel's Fairbury Motor Works also manufactured these engines between 1910 and 1914.

A 1923 Waterloo 1.5 Hp hit-n-miss engine connected to a pump jack and water pump in Fairbury.

CHAPTER 8

Typical Fairbury Country School Design

Early farming was very labor-intensive. Farm families were large, so the children could help with the farm work. The average farm size was less than 160 acres. With a one-mile square section of farmland, at least four farm families were required to cultivate those 640 acres.

The number of farm children in Livingston County peaked in 1900 at 6,000 students. This number of students led to establishing 299 country schools in Livingston County. Each of these schools averaged twenty students.

The Fairbury rural area included Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie townships. Seventeen country schools were constructed to educate the children from these townships. Of these 17 country schools, only a handful are still standing. Spence Farms has a well-preserved country schoolhouse that was relocated there from a nearby location.

The Pearson country school, about half a mile east of the Avoca Cemetery, is still standing, but it is in deplorable condition. After the country schools closed around 1949, many of them were modified to make them into small houses or farm storage sheds. The Pearson school was converted into a storage shed for farm machinery. The wood floor was removed, and a concrete pad was poured as a new floor. A large doorway was cut into one side of the school, and sliding barn door-style doors were installed. Unfortunately, the doorway opening was not adequately supported after the doorway was cut. The wall and entire roof now sag into the doorway opening.

Because Pearson School does not have many years left before it collapses, a computer drawing of the school was prepared to preserve the history of that building. Measurements were made of each building component and the overall building dimensions.

The country schools in the Fairbury area were constructed using the local farmers as volunteer workers. The overall design of all the schools was

similar in that these buildings had one large classroom with a small vestibule room attached. Since the classroom was a large room, these were often called one-room schoolhouses.

The specific design of each building varied according to who designed and built it. There was also variation in building materials depending on when the school was built.

The Pearson country school was one of the larger country schools in the area. It had one large room that measured thirty feet by twenty-four and a half feet. The primary classroom had 735 square feet of space. The small adjoined vestibule room measured fourteen feet by ten feet or 140 square feet. The large classroom could comfortably seat 25 students. The maximum number of students was about 30 students.

The earliest country schools likely used stacked limestone rock foundations. They also used frame construction and wood siding boards. Roof materials probably varied over time. The earliest-built country schools likely used stacked boards or cedar wood shingles. Later, tin sheeting or asphalt shingles became available as roofing materials.

The Pearson school has a stacked limestone rock foundation. This foundation utilized locally available limestone rocks that were piled five layers high. The stone foundation is 12 inches tall and eight inches deep. Massive wood beams six inches wide and 10 inches high are on top of the foundation. These massive wood beams were notched to accept two-by-six-inch floor joists. The flooring material was wood.

Modern two by four's measure one and a half inches by three and a half inches instead of the nominal two inches by four inches. The wall studs on the Pearson schoolhouse are the older full-size two-by-fours. In homes built before about 1930, wood lathes were nailed to the wall studs, and then plaster was applied. At the Pearson schoolhouse, wood lathes were not used. Instead of wood lathes, unique three-inch wide boards were used. These particular boards had a dovetail-shaped notch, allowing the plaster to adhere better to the wood boards. Local experts believe these unique plaster boards became available around 1930. These boards indicate the Pearson schoolhouse was built sometime after 1930.

The plaster walls inside the primary Pearson school classroom are in excellent shape, except where the roof leaks dissolved all the plaster. As a decorative accent, 34-inch high vertical wood wainscoting boards were installed on all four walls. The front of the classroom had two giant blackboards. Each blackboard was 10 feet wide and about 40 inches tall.

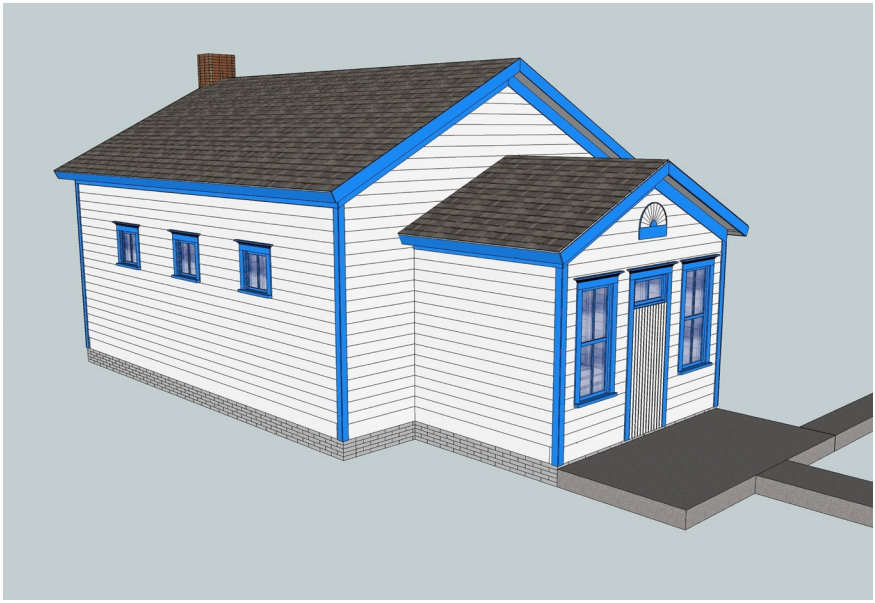
Country schools had stoves to provide heat in the classroom. The Pearson school had a brick chimney for the stove combustion gases to exhaust from the school. There was no insulation in the walls or ceiling, so it was challenging to keep the classroom warm. The east and west walls of the school each had three large windows. The windows were high to allow the classroom as much sunlight as possible.

Country schools had wells to provide water for the students and teachers. The old well could not be found at the Pearson school site. Schools also had a small shed to store coal for the furnace. No remnants of this coal shed could be found at the Pearson school.

These schools also had outhouses. At some point, some country schools installed an indoor chemical toilet in the small vestibule room. At least two of the 17 Fairbury area country schools had this indoor chemical toilet. Pearson School had a chemical toilet. This toilet was a 24-inch diameter steel pipe that went down into the ground. Students quickly learned not to drop their pencils down the chemical toilet accidentally.

Although the Pearson country school will soon collapse and disappear, the computer drawing will forever preserve the design and appearance of this country school.

Current condition of Pearson Country School located just east of the Avoca Cemetery.



Computer drawing of Pearson Country School when it was in new condition.

CHAPTER 9

Decker Family Known for Their Longevity

William B. Decker lived to be 103 years of age and was the oldest member of the Masonic Lodge in the world. One of his sons, Luther Berger "Bud" Decker, lived to be 92 years of age and served as the Fairbury City Clerk for over 40 years. The story of the Decker family began with the birth of William Burgher Decker in 1854 in Ghent, New York. He was the son of Henry P. Decker (1822-1905) and Catherine S. Colon (1816-1904).

William Decker grew up in the Ghent, New York, area, 30 miles south of Albany. When William was 21, he joined the Chatham, New York, Masonic Lodge. Sometime before 1881, William emigrated to a farm in Owego Township, east of Pontiac. In 1881, William married Emily Ellen "Emma" Foster in Pontiac. William was 27, and Emma was 24 when they married. They had six children.

Luther Berger "Bud" Decker was a son of William and Emma Decker, born in 1885. Around 1896, William Decker retired from farming and moved to Fairbury. The William Decker family lived at 207 West Oak Street. Bud Decker attended Fairbury schools. William Decker established a company that provided electricity to Fairbury homes.

In 1898, William Decker joined the Fairbury Tarbolton Masonic Lodge. The Fairbury Lodge was chartered in 1860 and is one of the oldest social clubs in Fairbury.

In 1903, Bud Decker finished his schooling. His first job was working at the Walton Bank in Fairbury when he was 18. In 1908, Bud took a new job as a traveling salesman for the Illinois Card & Novelty Company. After working for less than one year as a traveling salesman, Bud took a position at the Milne Drug Store in Fairbury. Bud worked 26 years as an assistant pharmacist at the Payne Bros. Drug Store in Fairbury. Eventually, Bud's father bought this drug store and renamed it the W. B. Decker and Sons Drug Store.

In 1912, William Decker sold the electric generating plant. He then purchased a rice farm in Wheatley, Arkansas. Several Fairbury men purchased rice farms near Stuttgart, Arkansas, in that era. The most notable of these men were Isaac Walton, one of the Walton Bros. Department store founders in Fairbury. Isaac Walton was the largest landowner of rice fields in Arkansas shortly before he died in 1913.

In 1927, Emma Decker, wife of Bud Decker, died at 70. She was buried at Graceland Cemetery. In 1933, Bud Decker married Johanna Sophia Meyer. Sophia was born in Crescent City, Illinois. Bud was 48, and Sophia was 33 when they married. Bud and Sophia had no children and lived at 408 East Ash Street.

In 1933, Bud Decker began a 40-year-long career as the Fairbury City Clerk. He eventually served four different mayors during his long career.

In 1954, at the age of 100, William Decker became the world's oldest Mason. William was the only Mason in Illinois awarded the 75-year member jewel. William's 100th birthday party was conducted at the Fairbury-Cropsey High School. Mason members from as far away as Berne, Switzerland, attended the party. William was presented with a hand-tooled plaque made by a Chicago artist whose hands had also fashioned works of art for the President, the crown prince of Japan, and the Pope.

In 1958, William Decker died at the age of 103 at the Masonic Home in Sullivan, Illinois. William was buried at Graceland Cemetery. Si Moser, Clarence Hadaway, J. K. Huette, Russell Mowery, Harvey Day, and Bill Estep were pallbearers.

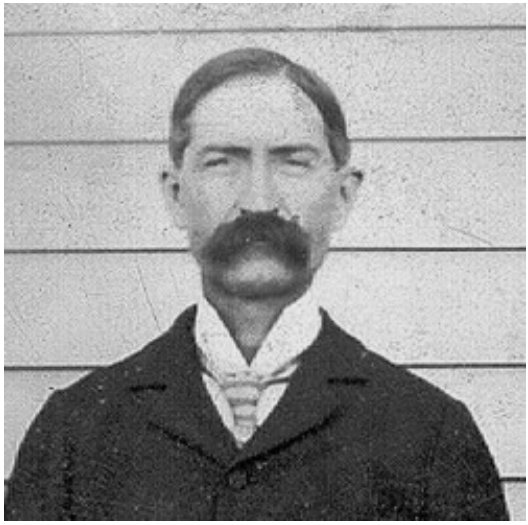
Sophia Decker, the wife of Bud Decker, died in 1970 at 69. She was buried in her hometown of Crescent City, Illinois, at the Saint Peters Lutheran Cemetery.

In 1973, Bud Decker retired as the City Clerk after serving over 40 years and four different mayors. At one time, Bud held five jobs: City Clerk, secretary-treasurer of the Trinity Lutheran Church and Graceland Cemetery Association, secretary of Royal Arch Masons, and secretary of the Fairbury City Council.

Four years later, in 1977, Bud Decker died at the age of 92 at the Greenbrier Lodge in Piper City. Bud was buried with his wife at the Saint Peters Lutheran Cemetery in Crescent City.

William Decker and his son Bud Decker were active members of the Fairbury community for over eight decades. William became the oldest member of the Masonic Lodge in the world, and Bud served over four decades as the Fairbury City Clerk.

When William Decker turned 100 in 1954, he became the oldest Masonic Lodge member in the world.



William Decker when he was a younger man.

CHAPTER 10

History of Avoca Township

Like many states, Illinois started with townships, then moved on to cities and states. In the Fairbury area, there are three townships. These townships are Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie. Avoca Township is north of the city of Fairbury. The town of Fairbury is in Indian Grove Township. Belle Prairie Township is south of Fairbury.

The first settlement in Avoca Township was in 1830. This first settler was Isaac Jourdan and his wife. In December 1830, the William Popejoy and John Hannaman families settled nearby. In 1832, the McDowell family settled on Indian Creek north of Fairbury.

The Black Hawk War was started in early April of 1832. There were 600 Kickapoo Indians camped just south of Chatsworth at Oliver's Grove. Although the Kickapoo had been friendly to the settlers, the early pioneers were very nervous when the war started. They decided to travel by horse and wagon to Indiana during the war. The war was over by late August of 1832, and the settlers returned from Indiana.

The first child born in what is now Avoca Township was Charles A. Brooks, a son of Charles Brooks. He was born on the 1st day of July 1833. The first marriage was that of Harvey Rounsaville and Miss Ann Thompson, who were married in September 1833. They were married by William McDowell, who had just been elected a Justice of the Peace. William had never officiated a wedding before, so he was trying to figure out how to conduct the ceremony. His wife, an ardent Methodist, had no problem instructing him how to perform the ceremony.

The first sermon in Avoca Township was at the house of Squire McDowell and was preached by Rev. James Eckels in the Spring of 1833. The McDowells established the village of Avoca. The first post office was established in 1840 and was called Avoca. Nicholas Hefner was the first Postmaster. Eventually, a church and a cemetery were built in the village.

Before the first bridge was built across either Indian Creek or the Vermilion River, the McDowells and their neighbors bought a canoe in partnership. The boat was left tied to the bank of the river. If someone needed the canoe, they used it and returned it to its storage location. Some of the neighbors got upset about the usage of the canoe. To end this strife, Judge McDowell and his brother James, went to the community canoe one day. They measured their canoe portion and sawed the canoe into two pieces. They took their part home and left the other half cabled to the river bank.

The first bridge in Avoca was built over the south branch of the Vermilion River in 1844. Isaac Burgit, Road Supervisor on the west side of the river, and Judge McDowell on the east side called out the road labor and built the bridge. It was all hewed out of the neighboring forest and was a substantial structure.

The first medical doctor to locate in Avoca was Dr. C. B. Ostrander. He was a very colorful character and loved to tell tall tales. In 1854, Judge McDowell and his brothers built a steam-powered sawmill in Avoca. Their main business was sawing lumber, but they also constructed a mill for grinding corn.

Judge McDowell was the Collector of Revenues in 1844. At that time, there was a premium on wolf scalps. A man who had killed a wolf could go before a Justice of the Peace and make an affidavit to that effect. The man would then receive a State warrant or order for one dollar. These warrants could be used to pay property taxes. There were enough wolves and hunters in Avoca Township that Judge McDowell reported all Avoca property taxes were paid using these warrants. There was not enough cash collected to pay Judge McDowell the fee he was due for administrating the wolf bounty program.

When the Chicago & Paducah Railroad installed its tracks from Pontiac to Fairbury in 1872, this prompted the creation of the village of McDowell. Judge McDowell owned the land and had the town surveyed in 1873. This little village, with a population of 32, still survives today.

The new railroad also created the small village of Lodemia. The post office was established in August 1877, with Dr. C. B. Ostrander as

Postmaster. A grain elevator, a church, and a country school were built there. John Bodley Sr. donated the land to build the church. The grain elevator, church, and country school all eventually burned down. Today, there is no trace of where Lodemia was located.

The only representative of the legal fraternity in Avoca Township in that era was Judge McDowell. He initially lived in Avoca but moved to Fairbury in 1860. In 1859, he was elected County Judge, an office he filled with credit. He was the Recording Steward of the Methodist Church at Avoca for twenty-five consecutive years.

When the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad helped to found the village of Fairbury, it was also the death knell for the small towns of Avoca and Lodemia. Most of the residents of these communities moved to Fairbury. Horses moved many houses from Avoca to Fairbury. A few of these houses moved from Avoca to Fairbury still stand today.

Judge McDowell also founded the city of Fairbury, Nebraska. He moved his steam-powered sawmill from Avoca to Fairbury, Nebraska. It was used to saw lumber to construct buildings in that new town.

The only reminder that there once was a village at Avoca is the Avoca Cemetery. The houses have been gone for many years, and the last church was torn down in 1935. The lumber from that church was hauled to Lake Bloomington and used to build structures there.

The only remaining feature of the village of Avoca is the Avoca Cemetery, five miles north of Fairbury on Indian Creek.

CHAPTER 11

History of Indian Grove Township

Like many states, Illinois started with townships, then moved on to cities and states. In the Fairbury area, there are three townships. These townships are Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie.

The first settlement in Indian Grove Township was Joseph Moore. He came from Overton County, Tenn., and arrived here in the Fall of 1831. His journey to Illinois was a difficult one. He walked on foot while his wife carried their infant on her lap while riding a horse. He staked out a claim in the timber bordering Indian Creek, on which he permanently settled.

In 1832, A. B. Philips, known as Barney Philips, settled in Indian Grove Township next. He was also from Tennessee and had been a neighbor of Joseph Moore. Reverend John Darnall, a brother of Martin Darnall, the first settler of Belle Prairie, came to Indian Grove soon after Barney Phillips.

Malachi Spence, his son, James Spence, and Richard Moore settled a year or two after those already mentioned. Richard Moore was from Overton County, Tennessee. The Spence and Darnall families came from Kentucky. Mrs. Glenn Phillips, a widow lady, came from the same neighborhood in Tennessee, and she arrived with the Spence and the Moore families.

When the first white people settled here, they had to go some distance to mill their grain. They had to go to Green's mill on the Fox River near Ottawa or the Crow Creek mill below Peoria. When Mr. Moore made his first trip to the Crow Creek mill, it was a one-week trip. The distance was sixty miles and was the best chance for grinding in their reach until a mill was built on the Kankakee River at Wilmington. It was sometimes about as hard for the newcomer to find grain as to get it ground after he had got it, for no one had been in the country long enough to have an over-supply. There was no mill in this township until the erection of one in the village

of Fairbury, except a little horse-powered mill built by Mr. Smith about 1840.

For many years, the nearest post office was at Bloomington. In those early days, Bloomington consisted of a small log house with a little store and a post office. The postage on letters was twenty-five cents. This amount would be equivalent to $6 in today's dollars. Postage had to be paid by the letter receiver. Because the person could not afford the postage, mail would stay at the post office for a considerable amount of time until the postage could be paid.

In those early times, the settlers hauled wheat to Chicago and congratulated themselves highly if they were fortunate to get fifty cents a bushel for it. Chicago was a tiny town. The city had yet to rise from the bogs and marshes of Lake Michigan to become a great grain market later.

The first birth in this township was that of John R. Phillips, a son of Barney Phillips. He was born on May 9, 1832. John Phillips was the first white child born in Livingston County. The first wedding was between John Darnall and Keziah Spence. They were married by Squire John Thompson, of Mackinaw, in early 1832.

Esther Spence died in 1832. She was buried in the little graveyard situated on the line between Indian Grove and Belle Prairie Township, near where Martin Darnell initially settled. She was the first death in the Indian Grove settlement and perhaps the first in the county. Her coffin was made of walnut slabs split out of the tree, hewed down, and then dressed smooth.

The first Justice of the Peace was Rev. John Darnall. He was a preacher, a Justice of the Peace, the first Postmaster, and a man of considerable importance in the neighborhood. One of the first medical doctors to serve this township was Dr. C. B. Ostrander. He was widely known for his ability to tell tall tales.

One time a patient complained to Dr. Ostrander that the bill for his services was too high. The Doctor informed the patient, very confidentially, that he would not be surprised if he knew the cost of the medicine. Dr. Ostrander told him the drug cost $2,700 an ounce, and it required the services of ten men for four months to gather just one ounce.

Furthermore, nine of the ten men lost their lives while gathering medicine. The $2,700 figure that Dr. Ostrander used in his tall tale would be equivalent to $65,000 in today's dollars.

The sound of the Gospel was heard in Indian Grove Township almost as soon as the pioneer's ax. Reverend John Darnall was a Baptist preacher and the first to proclaim the word of God in the new settlement. Rev. Robert Smith, a Cumberland Presbyterian, was the next preacher.

The first school in Indian Grove Township was taught by Chancy Standish in 1835. He was from New York and came to the settlement in 1835. After he arrived, the local people began building a little log cabin for school purposes. This log cabin was the first schoolhouse in the township. In this building, Standish taught the first school. This schoolhouse was a general subscription school where the parents of the students paid the teacher's salary. In this era, there was no public money for educational purposes.

About 600 Kickapoo Indians camped in what is now Indian Grove Township. The name of the township comes from this Kickapoo camp. All of the Kickapoo left their settlement in Indian Grove about the time the first settlers arrived. They moved to Oliver's Grove, about three miles south of Chatsworth.

Both Indian Creek and Indian Grove Township got their names from the Kickapoo tribe that lived in this township.

Both Indian Grove Township and Indian Creek were named after the 600 members of the Kickapoo Tribe that lived south of Fairbury.

CHAPTER 12

History of Belle Prairie Township

In the Fairbury area, there are three townships. These townships are Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie. Avoca Township is north of the city of Fairbury. The town of Fairbury is in Indian Grove Township. Belle Prairie Township is south of Fairbury.

Belle Prairie Township has the distinction of having the first settler in Livingston County. This early pioneer was Valentine Martin Darnall, recognized as the first actual settler of the county. He was born in Virginia. When he was a child, his parents moved to Kentucky and settled in Boone County. Their home was one and a quarter miles from Boonsboro, where the pioneer Daniel Boone built a fort more than a century ago.

Three of his brothers moved to Mackinaw. Valentine came from Kentucky and went to the home of his brothers first. He came from Mackinaw to Belle Prairie Township on a scouting trip to find his new home in 1830. Valentine knew his family would need something to eat in the wilderness. He bought some grain and drove his horse-drawn wagon to the Springfield grain mill. He had to wait for the miller to grind his grain, so the whole trip to the miller took fourteen days.

He took his family to their new home in Indian Grove, and they pitched a tent to live in while he built a log cabin. During the day, he would chop down trees. At night, by the light of a campfire, he would split the logs into boards using his only tool, an ax. No steel nails were available, so he built the cabin with wood pins.

There were also no steel hinges available for the cabin door. Instead, Valentine found two forked branches and used these for hinges. The cabin door would slide on the two forked pieces and close by the force of gravity.

The winter of 1830 was one of the worst on record. The snowdrifts reached eight feet deep. Valentine almost got lost in the blizzard but returned safely home. He was distraught that the three young calves he had

left outside in their pens would be frozen. When he returned, he found that his wife had cleared a path in the deep snow to the pens and herded the three calves inside the heated cabin.

The next settlement was made in this township by William Spence in 1831. He was a son of Malachi Spence, one of the early settlers of Indian Grove Township. He came from Indiana to this settlement but was originally from Kentucky. The Spence and Darnall families all came from Kentucky.

Other early settlers were Jeremiah Travis, James Cooper, Hugh Steers, Spencer Kates, Benjamin Hieronymous, and Decatur Veatch. Benjamin Hieronymous recounted that before the railroads, he would haul his grain all the way to Chicago. He also transported peaches and other fruit to Chicago. He did this annually for 25 years before railroads were implemented. Decatur Veatch was among the early settlers of Belle Prairie Township and was said to have been one of the first Abolitionists in Livingston County.

Another early settler was Benjamin Walton. He was the older brother of Isaac and John Wesley Walton, founders of the Walton Bros. department store in Fairbury. One of Benjamin's initiatives was to mark the farmland by putting up stone corners in each section of land in the township. These stones weighed more than 200 pounds and were at each township corner.

The first white child born in the settlement is supposed to have been William Steers, a son of Hugh Steers, and was born in 1834. The first wedding was that of William Spence and Miss Mary Darnall. The license authorizing the solemnization of their nuptials was the first issued from the Clerk's Office of Livingston County after its formation. They were married by Reverend John Darnall in 1837. Benjamin Hieronymous and a Miss Darnall, sister to the bride just mentioned, were married soon after and were probably the second marriage in the township.

The first Justice of the Peace in Belle Prairie Township was Spencer Kates. He was commissioned as such about the year 1840, while this town was yet a part of Indian Grove Precinct. Jeremiah Travis was the first blacksmith and plied his vocation from his first settlement so far as the few scattering settlers required his services. He was also a chair maker. Many

of his chairs are still to be found in this and surrounding neighborhoods. Dr. Ostrander was the first medical doctor to service this township. Dr. C. B. Ostrander was widely known for his ability to tell tall tales.

The first and only church to be built in this settlement was the Methodist Episcopal Church in the southern part of the township. It is a good-frame building and was erected in 1865 for $1,500. This cost would be equivalent to $25,400 in today's dollars. The church was dedicated upon its completion by Reverend Rhodes, the presiding Elder of the district. Mrs. Hanna was the first person buried in the little cemetery just north of the church.

Initially, the church also had a parsonage building. At some point, the parsonage burned down. Community residents have lovingly preserved this little church. This old church offers an exciting glimpse into church life in the 1860s.

In 1858, the first temple of learning was built in Belle Prairie Township. A few of the neighbors resolved to have a schoolhouse. But, upon consultation with carpenters and builders, they found that it would cost more than they could afford. Benjamin Walton finally took the contract and proceeded immediately to put up the building. He hauled the material from Pontiac himself. Benjamin took what donations he could get. Eventually, Benjamin collected enough donations to cover the cost of the first school. Later, the country schools were built every two miles in the township. The rationale for the two miles was that students should only walk one mile to attend school.

There are only a couple of things from early life in Belle Prairie Township that still survive today. The Fairview Methodist Episcopal Church, built in 1865, still stands and is an excellent example of early churches in the area. Although technically in Indian Grove Township, the small Spence Cemetery is where pioneer settlers Valentine Martin Darnall and Malachi Spence are buried.

One of the few remaining reminders of early life in Belle Prairie Township is the Fairview Methodist Church built in 1865.

CHAPTER 13

Stafford's Generosity Improved Fairbury

Fairbury still benefits from the generosity of Floyd and Marion Stafford. The Stafford family's story began with Frederick Stafford's birth in Canada in 1830. In 1852, he married Catherine Miller. They lived in Canada until 1866, when they moved to the Chatsworth area. One year later, Catherine Stafford died. In 1868, Frederick Stafford married Mrs. Jennie Green. In Chatsworth, Frederick Stafford was a carpenter and a grain dealer. Frederick Stafford and his family moved from Chatsworth to the Cropsey area in 1883. Frederick was in the grain business for a few years at Cropsey before returning to his trade as a carpenter. Frederick died in 1901 in Cropsey.

One son of Frederick and Jennie Stafford was Frederick Blair Stafford, born in 1871. Frederick B. Stafford grew up in the Chatsworth area. In 1897, Frederick B. Stafford married Elizabeth Barnes. She was the granddaughter of pioneer settler John H. Barnes.

Mr. Barnes moved from Pennsylvania to Belle Prairie Township in 1868. His son, David White Barnes, married Mary Jane Haines. One daughter of David and Mary Barnes was Elizabeth Barnes.

One son of Frederick B. and Elizabeth Stafford was Floyd Eugene Stafford. Floyd was born in 1898 in Belle Prairie Township. When Floyd was four years old in 1902, his parents had an artist paint his portrait. In that era, the custom was to dress young boys in young girls' clothing for pictures. This portrait of Floyd Stafford is on permanent display in the Fairbury Echoes Museum.

Floyd attended the local country school and enlisted in the U.S. Navy for World War I. Floyd made 20 trips across the Atlantic on ships carrying American troops to fight in France.

In 1928, Floyd married Myrtle J. Morris. Myrtle was born in Mount Olive, Illinois. In 1930, Floyd and Myrtle Stafford were living in Niles, Illinois, and he was the proprietor of a lunch stand. In 1942, Floyd and Myrtle were

living in Waukegan. Floyd was employed at the American Steel & Wire Co. in Waukegan. Floyd and Myrtle had no children. Myrtle Stafford died in Waukegan in 1945 at the age of 46. She was buried in Graceland Cemetery in Fairbury.

Marion McDowell was born in 1905 in Fairbury. She was the daughter of Grant Yates McDowell (1863-1955) and Jennie Curl Dominy (1866-1947). The family tree of G. Y. McDowell traces back to the pioneering McDowell family that settled north of Fairbury in 1832. They were the second family to settle in the Fairbury area.

The family tree of Jennie Curl Dominy includes two of Fairbury's wealthiest and most prominent families. These two families were the Beach and Dominy families. Thomas A. Beach was the brother of Marion McDowell's great-grandfather. Thomas A. Beach, a banker in Fairbury, built the "Lion House" on East Hickory Street. Thomas A. Beach was Fairbury's wealthiest citizen and was worth over $50 million in today's dollars when he died in 1911.

The grandfather of Marion McDowell was Lorenzo Beach Dominy (1844-1902). Lorenzo Dominy and his wife Phoebe built the Dominy Memorial Library to honor their deceased 17-year-old daughter Hazel Dominy.

Marion McDowell's father, G. Y. McDowell, was a wealthy Fairbury banker. In 1947, at the age of 42, Marion McDowell married widower Floyd Stafford. Floyd was 48 years old when he married Marion McDowell.

In 1969, Floyd Stafford was 71 years old, and his wife Marion was 64 years old. That year was the start of a long-term trend of donating their wealth to projects which improved the quality of life for Fairbury area citizens. In 1969, the Indian Creek Golf decided to build a new clubhouse. The original clubhouse at the end of South Fifth Street had outlived its useful life. Floyd and Marion Stafford donated $15,000 to construct the new clubhouse. Fairbury volunteers provided most of the labor to build the new clubhouse.

The Staffords continued their generosity in 1976 when they purchased the house just east of the Dominy Library. In 1977, this house became

Fairbury's only museum, the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Marion Stafford also donated many family heirlooms to help stock the museum. Marion also made a significant cash contribution to the museum's operating fund. When the Dominy Memorial Library decided to expand to the east, the Fairbury Echoes Museum was moved to Locust Street, and the house was torn down.

In 1957-1958, the Fairbury community raised funds to build the town's first swimming pool. By 1980, the original pool had outlived its design life and needed to be replaced. Floyd Stafford passed away in California in 1980 at the age of 82. Marion Stafford decided to help fund a new swimming pool by donating 177 acres of farmland. The ground was sold and used to help build the new swimming pool. Marion Stafford flew back from California to Fairbury to attend the opening ceremonies of the new swimming pool.

The Staffords started to spend their winters in California. They kept their Fairbury home until 1976. After that, they lived in California.

In 1997, Prairie Lands Foundation began investigating how a new park could be built on North First Street. It was discovered the City of Fairbury could apply for a $212,500 grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources if they could match the amount with local funds. Prairie Lands Foundation and the city devised a solution that did not involve Fairbury taxpayer funds. To come up with the local matching funding, the Prairie Lands Foundation donated the swimming pool to the City of Fairbury. This plan satisfied the State of Illinois, and the new park project began.

Marion Stafford donated $170,000 to pay for the walking trail at North Park. The city got another matching state grant so the trail could be expanded to run from the swimming pool to Prairie Central High School.

Marion Stafford passed away in 1998 at the age of 93 in California. She was interred near her husband, Floyd Stafford, in the mausoleum at Graceland Cemetery. Their generous contributions significantly improved the quality of life for all Fairbury citizens.

Marion and Floyd Stafford. Their donations helped built the clubhouse at the Indian Creek golf course, the swimming pool, the Fairbury Echoes Museum, and North Park in Fairbury.

Marion and Floyd Stafford helped to fund the current Fairbury swimming pool and North Park.

CHAPTER 14

Tucker's Ford Across the Vermilion

The first settlers in Avoca Township north of Fairbury had no way of crossing the Vermilion River except by fording or walking through a shallow spot with their animals. Tucker's Ford was the early way of crossing the Vermilion River until bridges were built.

The story of Tucker's Ford began with the birth of Nicholas Henry Hefner in 1804 in Virginia. In 1830, he married Mary "Polly" McDowell (1810-1892) in Tippecanoe, Indiana. Their first child, Matilda C. Hefner, was born in 1831 in Indiana.

In 1832, the McDowell family moved to Illinois. They were the first settlers north of what is now Fairbury. They settled about three miles north of Fairbury, near the Avoca Cemetery. Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Hefner and their infant daughter accompanied the McDowell family to this area. In 1840, Nicholas bought land from the federal government in Sections 14 and 15 in Avoca Township.

Mr. Hefner was active in the community and was elected to the position of Sheriff of Livingston County. Nicholas Hefner gave the township the name of Avoca. This term meant meeting the waters since the two branches of the Vermilion River united in this township. In 1840, a post office was created for the village of Avoca. Nicholas Hefner was the first Postmaster of Avoca.

In that early era, there were no bridges across the Vermilion River. Many farmers, including Mr. Hefner, took their wheat to Green's Mill on the Fox River near Ottawa. If the Vermilion was low, they could ford the river with their grain wagon. They would build a raft to transport their wagon across the river if the Vermilion were high.

The 1878 Livingston County history book by Le Baron recounts the experience of one local farmer. This farmer had a wagon drawn by two horses and needed to cross the river. The river had been frozen for some time, and the ice was starting to break. The farmer unhooked the horses

from the wagon and placed both horses on a large block of ice. As they started across the river, the giant ice block broke into two pieces. The front legs of the horses were on one chunk of ice, and the back legs on another. The farmer carefully got all four horses' legs on the ice block and paddled them across. The farmer then put the wagon on a large ice block and paddled it across. He hitched the horses back to the wagon, and the farmer continued his business.

Unfortunately, Mr. Hefner, one of the pioneering settlers of Avoca Township, died in 1851 at the age of 46. His wife became a widow at age 41 and had to care for their many children.

Joel Tucker was born in 1800 in Middleton, Ohio. In 1821, Joel married Sarah "Sallie" Ann Stull in Ohio. They started to raise a large family in Tippecanoe, Indiana. In 1844, the Tucker family moved from Tippecanoe to the McDowell area northwest of Fairbury. Unfortunately, Sallie Tucker died in 1853 at the age of 52. Joel Tucker became a widower with a large family of children to raise.

Polly Hefner and Joel Tucker decided to join their two large families, and they married in 1853. In later years, Polly's daughter Matilda C. Hefner married Joel's son Williard Tucker. Polly and Joel Tucker settled on the north end of Section 16 in Avoca Township near the Vermilion River.

The Vermilion River dipped south near the Joel and Polly Tucker farm. It was also shallow in this area and became well known as Tucker's Ford across the Vermilion. It was approximately one mile west and one mile south of the current bridge across the Vermilion on First Street north of Fairbury.

The 1893 Livingston County Atlas records that widow Mary "Polly" Tucker owned the land south of the Vermilion River in Section 16 of Avoca Township. John Edward Bodley, Sr., owned the ground on the north side of the Vermilion.

In June of 1877, the Pantagraph recounted two stories about Tucker's Ford. The first story was about one of the most significant fishing expeditions that ever occurred in the Fairbury area. Seventy-three members of the families of Fairbury businessmen use a seine and hooks to catch 300 to

400 pounds of fish. The freshly caught fish were cooked and served for dinner to the attendees. The Pantagraph also noted everyone had a glorious time without anybody getting in too much "drink bait."

The second article about Tucker's Ford was a McDowell family reunion held at Joel Tucker's residence, seven miles north of Fairbury. Approximately 25 McDowell family members attended the gathering.

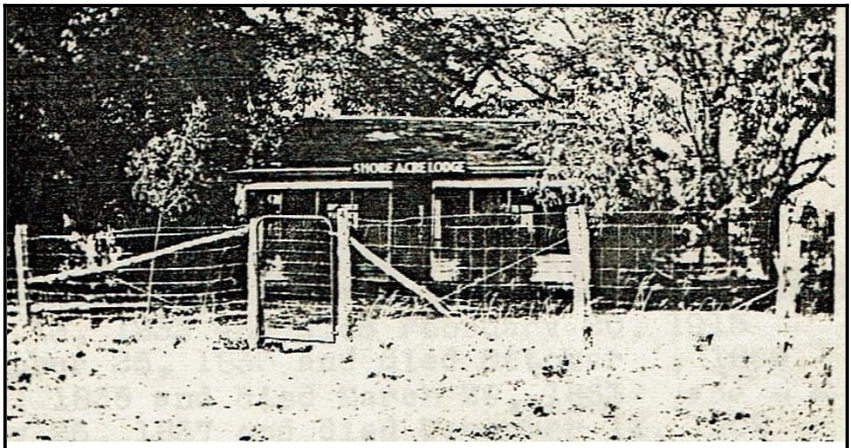
Back in 1891, there were Methodist Churches at Lodemia and Avoca. Reverend Hobbs served both of these churches. In July that year, the Blade recounted that Rev. Hobbs baptized seven converts in the Vermilion River at Tucker's Ford. The Blade also reported that Rev. Hobbs had added 40 additions to his congregational flock since the previous meeting. Since the Vermilion River was relatively shallow at that point, it made sense to conduct baptisms at Tucker's Ford. The Lodemia Methodist church burned down a few hours after the funeral of John Edward Bodley Jr. in 1905. The Avoca Methodist church was torn down in 1935. The lumber was transported and used to construct buildings at East Bay Camp in Lake Bloomington.

Joel Tucker's widow, Polly McDowell Tucker, passed away in 1892 at 81. Joel and Polly Tucker were both buried in the Avoca Cemetery.

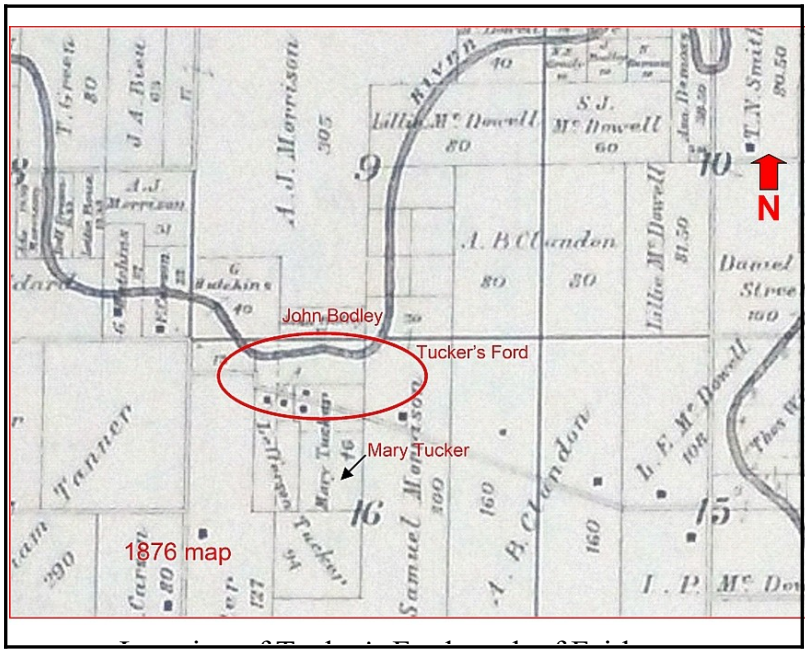
The descendants of Joel Tucker continued to have annual family reunions at Tucker's Ford many years after he died in 1885. One of the last family reunions mentioned in the Pantagraph occurred in September 1944. That year, 40 descendants met at the Shore Acre Lodge at Tucker's Ford five miles northwest of Fairbury. They recounted that Joel Tucker had previously stopped his covered wagon at this spot over 100 years before.

Eventually, bridges were built over the Vermilion River on First Street north of Fairbury and at McDowell. Once the bridges were built, fords across the Vermilion were no longer needed. Tucker's Ford was a vital transportation feature for farmers in the era before modern bridges.

Tucker's Ford over Indian Creek



Shore Acre Lodge at Tucker's Ford


John Bodley
Tucker's Ford
Mary Tucker
1876 map
N

CHAPTER 15

Dr. Lewis Delivered Over 1,000 Fairbury Babies

Dr. George C. Lewis was a Fairbury physician from 1883 until 1911, and he delivered 1,000 new babies during his 28 years of practice. The story of the Dr. George C. Lewis family began with the birth of Henry Lewis (1640-1688) in Narberth, Wales, in 1640. Henry Lewis married Margaret Protherah in Wales. Henry and Margaret Lewis were Quakers.

Members of the Quaker faith were persecuted for their religious beliefs in Great Britain in that era. William Penn, who the state of Pennsylvania is named after, was a Quaker spiritual leader. Mr. Penn came to America to establish a colony where people could enjoy religious freedom. The settlement became a haven for minority religious sects from Germany, Holland, Scandinavia, and Great Britain.

When William Penn sailed to America in 1862, Henry and Margaret Lewis sailed with him on the same ship. Henry and Margaret Lewis settled in what is now the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, area. Henry Lewis was the foreman of the first grand jury in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Henry and Margaret Lewis were the fourth great-grandparents of Dr. George Lewis.

The Lewis family remained in the Philadelphia area for several generations. Family members fought in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Joseph Lewis (1769-1853), grandparent of Dr. George Lewis, emigrated from Philadelphia to Bethel, Ohio. Joseph Lewis married Rachel Canby (1768-1852), and they both lived and died in Ohio. Bethel is a village about 30 miles southeast of Cincinnati.

One of the sons of Joseph and Rachel Lewis was William Lewis. He was born in 1806 in Chester County, Pennsylvania, and emigrated to Bethel, Ohio, with his parents. William married Nancy Crawford (1809-1891). Nancy was also born in Pennsylvania. They had a large family.

One of the children of William and Mary Lewis was George Canby Lewis, born in 1856 in Holms County, Ohio. George's middle name was his

paternal grandmother's maiden name. George attended local schools, then went to Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in the Class of 1880. George was 24 when he finished college.

After finishing his undergraduate degree, George started to attend medical lectures at Columbus Medical College. He then enrolled at the Bellevue Hospital Medical College in New York City. The Bellevue Hospital Medical College was founded in 1861 and was the first medical college in New York with connections to a hospital. George graduated with the Class of 1883. Dr. George C. Lewis then moved to Fairbury and started his 28-year medical practice.

On May 16, 1883, Dr. George C. Lewis married Ella Beach in Fairbury. Dr. Lewis was 26, and Ella was 21 when they married. Ella Beach was the daughter of Thomas A. Beach. Thomas A. Beach was a businessman and banker in Fairbury. In 1872, Thomas A. Beach had his home at 402 E. Hickory built. The house is an example of Italianate architecture and is often called the "Lion House" because of the two concrete lions in the front yard. Jack Tollensdorf refurbished the home and was responsible for adding the house to the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. The Thomas A. Beach family also had their mausoleum built in Graceland Cemetery. Thomas A. Beach was Fairbury's wealthiest citizen, and his net worth when he died in 1911 exceeded $50 million.

Dr. George Lewis and his wife Ella had three children. Thomas Beach Lewis was born in 1884. Daughter Amelia Beach "Mamie" Lewis was born in 1886. Daughter Alma Eloise Lewis was born in 1899.

Thomas Beach Lewis graduated with the Class of 1902 at Fairbury Township High School. Thomas B. Lewis then attended Northwestern University for two years. Thomas B. Lewis decided to become a lawyer and graduated in 1909 from the University of Illinois law school. He became a lawyer for the Peoria law firm of King and Boggess. In 1910, Thomas B. Lewis married Miss Jeanette Schmoldt of Beardstown. Thomas B. Lewis and Jeanette Schmoldt were both 25 years of age when they married. They lived in Peoria.

Amelia Beach died in 1910 at the age of 81. Thomas A. Beach died in 1911 at the age of 82. They were both interred in the Beach family mausoleum at Graceland Cemetery. After the deaths of Thomas A. Beach and Amelia Beach, the Dr. George C. Lewis family moved into the Beach Lion House on Hickory Street. Dr. Lewis was a scholarly gentleman, and he possessed an extensive library. Mrs. George Lewis developed the gardens adjoining her home into one of the showplaces of the community.

Dr. George C. Lewis retired in 1911 after practicing medicine in Fairbury for 28 years. When he retired, Dr. Lewis noted that he had delivered about 1,000 babies in Fairbury during his career.

Also, in 1911, Mamie Lewis, daughter of George and Ella Lewis, married Walter C. Ficklin. Walter was 25, and Mamie was 24 when they married. Walter and Mamie Ficklin had four children.

In 1913, Fairbury only had two school buildings. These two buildings were the North and South Side schools. The School Board decided a new high school building was needed. Dr. George Lewis and his wife, Ella, donated land for the Fairbury Township High School and an athletic field. In honor of their donation, the athletic field was named Lewis Field.

In 1914, construction started on the new brick Fairbury Township High School on North Seventh Street. The school was completed in time for the 1914-1915 school year.

Unfortunately, Thomas B. Lewis died in 1915 at the age of 30. In the summer of 1914, he began to experience severe problems with heart disease. After being ill for two months at his Peoria home, he was brought to his parent's home in Fairbury so Dr. Lewis and his wife could care for him. Unfortunately, after eight months of illness, he died at the age of 30 at his parent's home and was interred in the Beach family mausoleum.

After the new high school was placed into service, the other two brick schools were named the North and South Side Schools. Apparently, citizens thought fancier names were needed for these two grade schools. A city-wide naming contest was held in May of 1918. The naming contest winners were Isaac Walton for the North Side School and Edison for the South Side School.

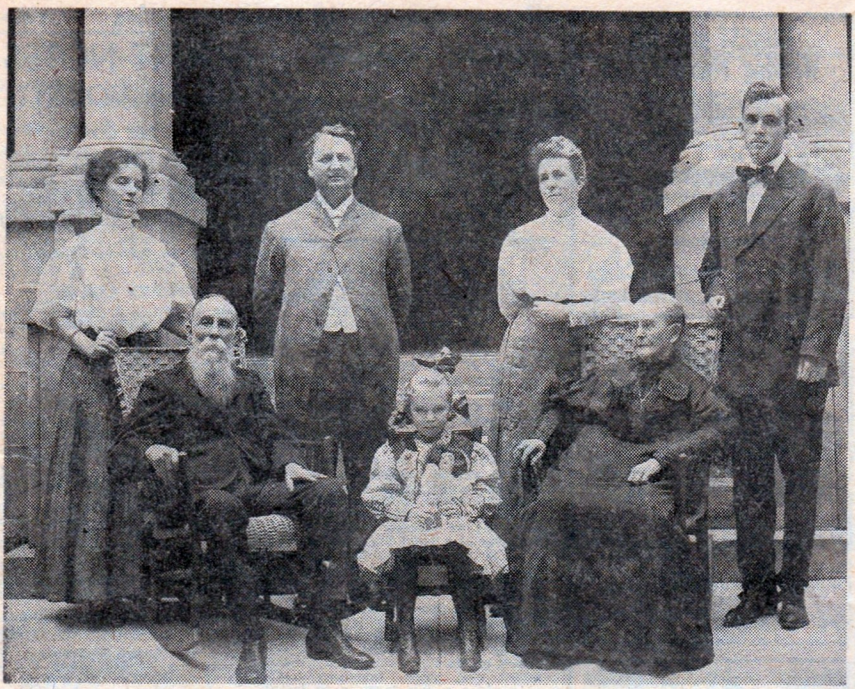
In 1924, Alma Eloise Lewis married Percy C. James. He was 22, and she was 24 when they married. They had five children. Alma Lewis James became a Fairbury historian and wrote several books. Her most famous book about Fairbury history was Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars, first published in 1967 and revised in 1977.

Dr. George C. Lewis and his wife, Ella Lewis, were involved with several forms of philanthropy. Besides donating land for the new Fairbury Township High School, they supported medical missionaries in China, Africa, and India. They also contributed money to the Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington.

Dr. George C. Lewis died in 1932 at the age of 75. Six boys that Dr. Lewis had delivered as babies were his pallbearers at his funeral. These included Lester Freed, Walter Henning, Louis Brown, John Wessels, Fred Wessels, and Loren Haner. Dr. Lewis was interred in the Beach Family Mausoleum.

According to the 1932 Illinois Wesleyan University Bulletin, during the lifetime of the late Dr. George C. Lewis of Fairbury, Illinois, he and his wife, Mrs. Ella Beach Lewis, long-time friends of the University, gave to the institution lands and securities with a total valuation of $100,000. This gift is ultimately to provide for the endowment of the chair of Biology and the creation of several additional scholarships. Note that $100,000 in 1932 would equal $2,205,165 in today's dollars.

In 1939, Ella Beach Lewis died at the age of 77. The legacy of Dr. George C. Lewis and his wife, Ella Lewis, includes many family descendants spread around the United States. Another form of their legacy is Lewis Field at Prairie Central High School. Dr. Lewis and his wife also helped to preserve the Lion House on East Hickory Street. Because of their generosity, many students at Illinois Wesleyan University benefited from their scholarship fund. Alma Lewis James, daughter of Dr. Lewis and his wife, Ella Lewis, became a Fairbury historian and wrote the Stuffed Clubs & Antimaccassars book, which documents Fairbury's history from its founding in 1857 until 1900.



Fairbury—A prominent family in Fairbury at the turn of the century was the one above, with its youngest member, Alma Lewis, in the center. She is now Mrs. Alma Lewis-James, who has recorded much of Fairbury's history into the 12 books she has written about her own family. She is the great-granddaughter of Dr. Lorenzo Beach, one of Fairbury's first doctors. Pictured above with her are her grandparents, Thomas A. Beach, seated left, and Amelia Beach, seated right; her parents, Dr. George Canby Lewis and Ella Beach Lewis, standing center; her sister, Mamie Lewis Ficklin, standing left, and her brother, Thomas Beach Lewis, standing right.

CHAPTER 16

Fairbury Native Had an Adventurous Life (Walter Phillips)

Fairbury native, Walter Shelley Phillips, known as El Comancho, was a self-educated and self-trained naturalist, artist, geologist, newspaper reporter, freelance writer, and author of numerous books.

The life story of Walter Shelley Phillips begins with the McDowell family. William McDowell was born in 1785 in Kentucky. In 1809, William married Sarah Dever (1787-1858) in Scioto County, Ohio. When they married, William was 24, and Sarah was 22. William and Sarah McDowell had nine children. William McDowell served in the War of 1812. In 1818, one of their nine children, Woodford G. McDowell, was born in Sciota County, Ohio.

In 1832, the William McDowell family emigrated to Avoca Township, about four miles north of Fairbury on Indian Creek. Son Woodford G. McDowell was 14 when they moved to Livingston County. The McDowell family established the village of Avoca, southwest of the Avoca Cemetery. When the TP&W railroad came through in 1857, and Fairbury was founded, all the houses in the town of Avoca were moved to Fairbury, McDowell, or Kankakee. Today, nothing is left except the Avoca Cemetery.

Unfortunately, William McDowell died in 1834 when he was only 48. Son Woodford G. McDowell was just 16 when his father died. Woodford G. McDowell became a lawyer and was eventually elected a Judge in Livingston County.

In 1842, Judge McDowell married Elizabeth Lane. He was 24, and Elizabeth was 19 when they married. Woodford and Elizabeth had eight children. In 1844, Oregon Hazard Perry Phillips was born in Brownsville, Pennsylvania. In 1847, Judge McDowell and Elizabeth had a daughter they named Eliza Jane McDowell.

In the 1860 U.S. Census, Oregon Phillips was 16 years old and lived with his parents in Jefferson, Pennsylvania. Sometime between the 1860 Census and 1862, Oregon Phillips moved to Fairbury and was a salesman.

On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces started the Civil War by firing on Fort Sumter, South Carolina. In July 1862, Oregon Phillips enlisted as a Private in Company D of the 71st Illinois Infantry. Oregon started his military service as a drummer boy and served until 1864. Oregon listed his height as five foot five inches on his enlistment papers, and his occupation was a salesman in Fairbury.

In 1866, Eliza Jane McDowell, daughter of Judge McDowell, married Oregon Phillips in Fairbury. He was 21, and she was 18 when they married. They had four children. The parents of Oregon Phillips were Eli Phillips (1796-1881) and Jemima Oliver (1804-1874). In 1867, Oregon and Eliza Phillips had a son named Walter Shelley Phillips in Fairbury.

In 1868, Judge McDowell went to Nebraska to make a lot of money by founding a new town that would also become the county seat.

In 1869, the Oregon and Eliza Phillips family moved in a covered wagon from Fairbury to Beatrice, Nebraska. Walter Phillips was just two years old when they moved. Oregon Phillips would later become a Colonel in the Nebraska National Guard.

Also, in 1869, Judge McDowell established the new town of Fairbury, Nebraska. He named the new city after his hometown of Fairbury, Illinois. The new town was 30 miles southwest of Beatrice, Nebraska. In 1870, the population of Fairbury, Nebraska, was 370. In 1871, the village became the county seat. In 1872, Fairbury, Nebraska, was incorporated. Many people moved from Fairbury, Illinois, to the new town of Fairbury, Nebraska.

In that era, there were still many Native Americans living in the Nebraska area. Custer's Last Stand was in 1876 in the Montana Territory. As a child, Walter Phillips became familiar with many Native American tribes, including the Otoes, Pawnees, Omahas, Sioux, Kiowa, Kansas, and others. Walter spent much of his time with the Otoes. He often lived for weeks at a time with the tribe's chief and the chief's family in their lodge and

accompanied them on buffalo hunts. Chief High Horse of the Sioux Tribe gave Phillips the name "Comanche." Later in life, Walter changed the name to "El Comancho" and used that name as a pseudonym for his writing and artwork.

Walter Phillips did not like school but loved the outdoors and often left home to roam the country while school was in session. He traveled from anywhere between one week and one year at a time. He frequently made friends with different Native American tribes as he ventured as far as Seattle and southern California. All the tribes he encountered welcomed him; many referred to him as some variation of "Lone Man." Early in his adult life, Phillips became a hunter for workers building the Burlington railroad across Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana.

In 1891, Oregon Phillips moved to a ranch in Washington State. Unfortunately, he suffered a stroke caused by working too hard on his ranch. Oregon never fully recovered from the stroke and died in 1897 at the age of 53. In 1919, Eliza Phillips, wife of Oregon Phillips, died in Seattle at the age of 72.

Also, in 1891, Walter Shelley Phillips married Rena Adelia Egleston in Lincoln, Nebraska. He was 24, and she was 17 when they married. Walter and Rena Phillips had four children. Throughout Walter's career, he wrote professionally and made illustrations for many newspapers and magazines, including Forest & Stream, Beatrice Express, Lincoln Call, the Seattle Telegraph, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, and Chicago’s Northwestern Lumberman.

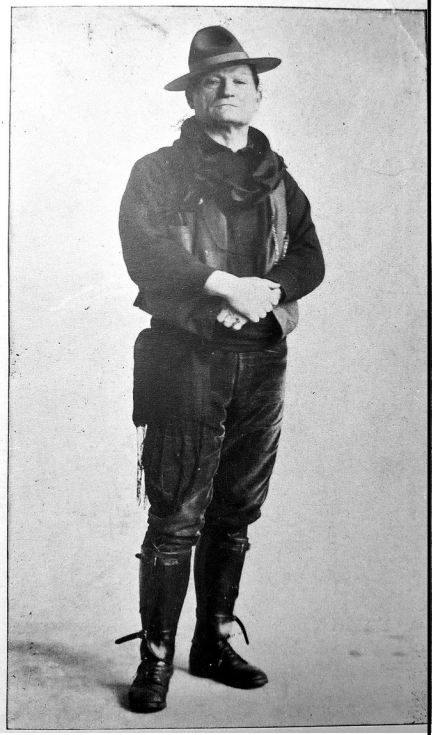
One of his newspaper columns, "Teepee Tales," was syndicated in newspapers nationwide. In 1904, he began the Pacific Sportsman magazine, which later became Outdoor Life. Phillips also wrote and illustrated his and others' books from the 1890s to the 1920s, including juvenile works, Indian legends, and more. He was also a talented artist. Walter sketched, painted, and made bas-relief carvings. He shared much of what he had learned and accomplished with the general public as he lectured nationwide.

Walter Phillips figured that over his lifetime, he made 198 round-trip tours of the country from coast to coast, and there was no 100-square-mile area

in the country that he had yet to see. He spent much of the last 12 years of his life at the Twelve Mile Ranch near Custer, South Dakota. Phillips returned to Seattle in July 1940 to the home of his daughter. Walter died just over a month later, on September 1, 1940, of a brain hemorrhage. He was 73 and was buried in Fairbury, Nebraska.

Walter's wife, Rena Phillips, died in 1949 at the age of 75. She was buried in Mason City, Illinois, her birthplace.

Oregon Phillips served in the Civil War and became a prominent citizen in Nebraska. He married Eliza Jane McDowell, daughter of Judge McDowell in Fairbury. The son of Oregon and Eliza Phillips, Walter Shelley Phillips, led an adventurous life and became a naturalist, artist, geologist, newspaper reporter, freelance writer, and author of numerous books.



Fairbury native Walter Shelley Phillips (1867-1940) circa 1935.

CHAPTER 17

Illinois Boys Reformatory School

Jason Strevell was a young Pontiac attorney back in the 1850s. Mr. Strevell joined a men's club, and each month the club had a guest speaker. When it was Mr. Strevell's turn to arrange for the guest speaker, he enlisted another attorney named Abraham Lincoln to come to Pontiac and give a lecture in January of 1860. After Mr. Lincoln gave his lecture, he went to Mr. Strevell's home at 401 West Livingston Street in Pontiac to wait for his train home. Mr. Strevell asked Abe Lincoln how tall he was, and Mr. Lincoln replied he was six foot four inches tall. Mr. Strevell measured Mr. Lincoln's height in a doorway. Mr. Lincoln was indeed six foot four inches tall. The Livingston County Historical Society recently refurbished Mr. Strevell's Pontiac home, which is open for public tours.

Mr. Strevell went on to become an Illinois state congressman and State Senator. In the early 1870s, Illinois citizens decided to build a new reformatory school for young boys. In February 1871, State Senator Jason Strevell sponsored a bill to locate the new Illinois Boys Reformatory School in Pontiac, Illinois. Pontiac was selected as the site for the new school. In June of 1871, the first six young men, convicted of stealing horses in Peoria, arrived at the Illinois Boys Reformatory School in Pontiac.

The theory of the reformatory was to educate young criminals and teach them a trade. The reformatory trade education options included granite tombstone manufacturing, barbering, textile manufacturing, printing, carpentry, blacksmithing, pipe fitting, bricklaying, laundry work, engine work, electrical work, military drills, and farming.

In 1894, the reformatory averaged 2,132 inmates. The youngest boys were ten years of age. Most of the boys were between the ages of 16 and 20. In 1894, 79% of the inmates were in the 16 to 20 age group. That year, 1,160 inmates were white, and 210 were non-white boys.

The boys sent to the reformatory were convicted of many crimes. In 1894, the boys committed 53 different types of crimes. 76% of these crimes

were theft-related. In 1894, twenty-six boys escaped from the reformatory. Twelve boys were captured, and three voluntarily returned to the facility.

The 1894 inmate data indicated most boys came from broken homes, and their parents were of lower incomes and poorly educated. In 1894, 45 percent of the boys came from Cook County.

After several years of operation, the reformatory management started to keep track of how successful they were at rehabilitating the young boys. In 1894, 86% of the boys left the reformatory and did not return because they had committed additional crimes. In 1904, management noted that over 5,000 boys had gone through the reformatory, and over 70% had become productive citizens.

In the early 1900s, several people and companies abused adult male prison labor in Illinois. Prison managers received kickbacks from companies for allowing these companies to use low-cost prison labor. Trade unions also complained the prisoners were taking jobs away from union members. As a result, new convict labor laws were passed in Illinois.

Although there was no labor abuse at the Pontiac reformatory, it fell under the same new laws as the adult prisons. At the reformatory, managers had to restrict or eliminate the teaching of specific trades covered by the new law. Since printing was not one of the specified trades, the reformatory expanded its printing plant operations and taught more boys the printing trade. The boys printed a weekly newspaper for all the boys to read.

Another innovation at the reformatory was allowing the boys to set up a government and bank. Only boys under the age of 17 could participate. The reformatory management allowed the boys to pass laws, and they were enforceable. The boys also operated a bank to serve all of the boys.

The reformatory had its own library. Eventually, the reformatory had over 12,000 books in its library. Some of these books were used in the classroom.

Most Livingston County citizens in that era viewed the reformatory favorably. Students at Fairbury area country schools often visited the facility on field trips. The reformatory had an excellent record of educating

the young boys and teaching them a trade. Less than 20% of the boys had trouble with the law after finishing their sentences at the reformatory.

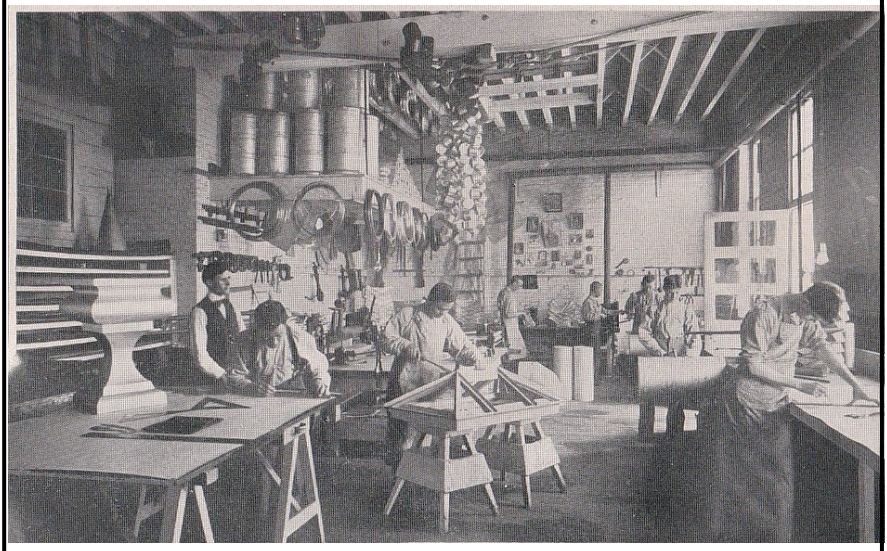
In 1893 the institution was changed from a boys' reformatory into a more conventional penal institution with the acceptance of inmates as old as twenty-one. The name of the institution was changed to the Illinois State Reformatory.

After 1904, many of the State's youngest juvenile offenders were no longer sent to Pontiac. They were placed in a new facility built in St. Charles, Illinois. This facility was named The Illinois School for Boys.

The Pontiac facility continued to evolve until it became the Pontiac Correctional Center. The current mission of the Pontiac Correctional Center is to protect the general public through incarceration, supervision, programs, and services designated to return offenders to the community with the skills to be useful and productive citizens.

The facility now consists of a total of 63 buildings, which comprise more than 744,000 square feet. The facility sits on a 37-acre site, with 32 acres enclosed by fencing. Pontiac Correctional Center houses the following offenders: segregation, protective custody, mental health, administrative detention reintegration management, and medium security.

For its first 20 years of existence, the Illinois Boys Reformatory School had a mission to educate and train boys between the ages of 10 and eighteen. The boys could learn any of 26 different trades. The facility was successful in that over 80% of the boys became productive members of society.



Boys learning the tinner's trade in the tin shop at the Reformatory in 1900.

CHAPTER 18

Wiley Sparks Experienced Many Changes in Fairbury Area

Wiley Sparks was one of the early settlers in the Fairbury area. The Sparks family first came to America in the early 1700s to Maryland. The family story of Wiley Sparks began with the birth of his father, Sanford Sparks, in 1808 in Ohio. Sanford Sparks married Emily Redman in 1828 in Brown County, Ohio. Sanford was 20, and Emily was 16 when they married. Sanford and Emily Sparks had six children.

Thomas Wiley Sparks, commonly referred to as Wiley Sparks was born in 1847 in Ohio. In late 1848, the Sanford and Emily Sparks family emigrated from Ohio to the village of Avoca north of present-day Fairbury. Wiley Sparks was 16 months old and came in a covered wagon with his family to the small settlement of Avoca.

The William McDowell family was one of the earliest families to settle in the Fairbury area in 1832. The McDowell family established the village of Avoca on Indian Creek, about five miles north of Fairbury.

When the Sanford and Emily Sparks family arrived in Avoca, it was a thriving little village with several stores, a hotel, a shingle mill, a church, and a cemetery. Bluff and Clark Streets were the east-west streets, and State and Main Streets were the north-south streets. The Sparks family lived next to the hotel in Avoca.

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. The founding of Fairbury on the new railroad was the death knell for the little village of Avoca. People began to immediately move their Avoca village houses to either Fairbury or McDowell. The Sanford and Emily Sparks family continued to live in Avoca after Fairbury was founded.

Wiley Sparks married Emily DeMoss in 1866. Emily's family were also pioneer settlers in Avoca Township. Wiley was 18, and Emily was 17

when they were married. Wiley and Emily Sparks had eleven children. Wiley Sparks continued to live in Avoca for the rest of his life.

The hotel in Avoca was dismantled. Part of the hotel was used to make the house Wiley Sparks lived in. Another piece of the hotel was taken to Fairbury and used to build a home at the southeast corner of Seventh and Hickory Streets. In 1930, Mrs. Edward Skinner lived in this home, and the street address was 513 E. Hickory Street. This house was eventually torn down sometime after 1930.

In January 1888, the Blade published a short question-and-answer paragraph with Avoca news. The Blade asked, "Why does Wiley Sparks now step higher than a blind horse in tall grass?" The answer was that Wiley Sparks had become a grandpa last Tuesday. Wiley Sparks was 41 years old when this article was written. Horses were terrified of snakes hiding in the tall grass and stepped high when walking through tall grass.

Emily Sparks, the wife of Wiley Sparks, died in 1905 at the age of 57. Mrs. Sparks was buried in the Avoca Cemetery. Wiley Sparks was 58 years of age when his wife died.

In August of 1914, the Blade reported that Wiley Sparks had his arm broken just above the elbow in a farming accident. Wiley was assisting in the shelling of corn at the J. C. Meis home and was oiling the sheller just before starting. The machinery was accidentally triggered, catching his arm in a belt. Wiley was 67 when this farming accident occurred.

Before the Social Security system was implemented and the first check was issued to Ida May Fuller in 1940, most men continued to work as long as they could after they reached age 65.

In September of 1924, Wiley Sparks was 77 years of age. The Blade reported that while Wiley Sparks was driving a load of coal through town, his horse team became frightened and ran away. The wagon struck the traffic post at the intersection of Main and First Streets, breaking it off and dumping most of the coal on the street. Mr. Sparks escaped without injury, but the wagon was severely damaged.

In late August of 1928, the Fairbury area experienced a severe rain and electrical storm on a Wednesday night between nine and eleven PM. Lightning struck the Wiley Sparks home north of Fairbury and damaged the home.

In May 1930, a fire started in the chicken brooder stove in an outbuilding at the Wiley Sparks farm. The fire destroyed some outbuildings on the farm. Through the hard work of the firefighters, the house was saved.

Wiley Sparks died on July 11, 1930, at the age of 83. He was buried in the Avoca Cemetery. Because he was such a well-known figure in the Fairbury area, the Blade published an extensive obituary for Wiley Sparks. The obituary noted that when Wiley came to Avoca in 1848, much of the land in the Fairbury area was swampy, and there was no local railroad. As a boy, Wiley saw the start of Fairbury in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. Wiley saw Fairbury grow dramatically in population while the village of Avoca quickly disappeared.

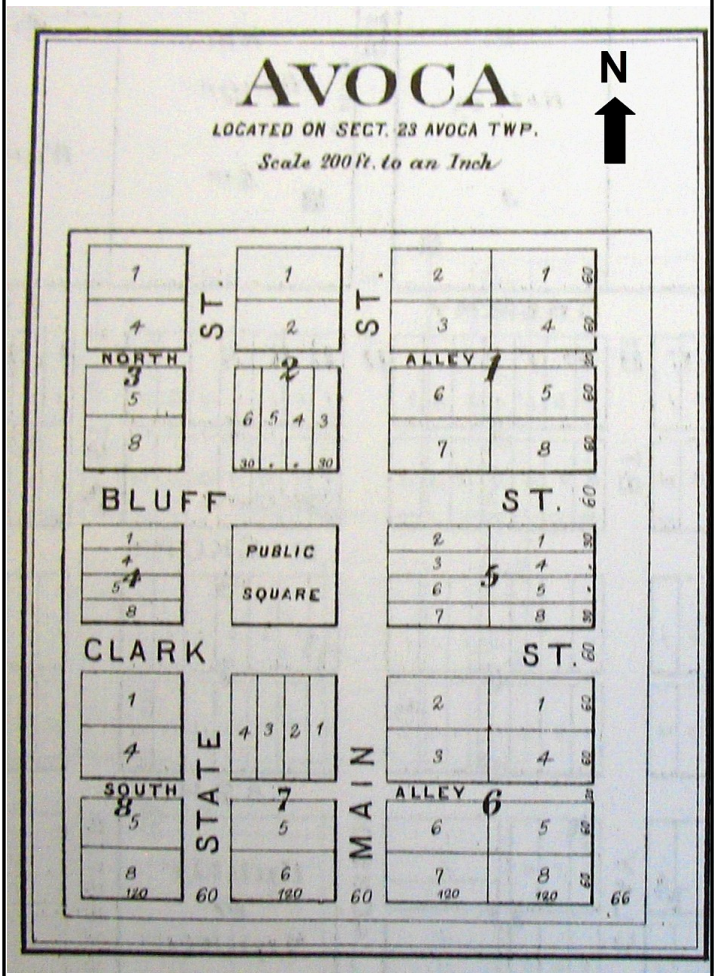
Wiley Sparks also saw the un-productive swampy land in the Fairbury area transformed into some of the most productive land on the planet when clay field tiles were installed to drain the ground in the 1880s. Wiley also lived through the transition from horse-based transportation to automobiles. Wiley saw the agricultural system being transformed from horses to tractors.

There are still many descendants of Wiley Sparks living in the United States. One of the eleven children of Wiley Sparks was Virgil Ray "Jack" Sparks (1889-1953). Jack Sparks married Phoebe Jennie Frances Schlicher in 1919. Jack was 30, and Phoebe was 21 when they married. Jack and Phoebe Sparks had six children.

One of the children of Jack and Phoebe Sparks was Glenn Allen Sparks. Glenn Sparks was born in 1920. In 1943, Glenn Sparks married Elva Jean Weakman. Glenn was 22, and Elva was 19 when they married. Glenn and Elva Sparks had five children. Glenn Sparks worked at Honegger's and was a well-known Fairbury citizen. Glenn died in 1994 at the age of 74.

The Sparks family were pioneer settlers of the Fairbury area. Wiley Sparks experienced all of the dramatic changes in the Fairbury area. These changes included the first railroad, Fairbury's founding, the decline of Avoca village, and the transition from horses to internal combustion engines in transportation and farming.

Photo of Wiley Sparks published in the Blade with his 1930 obituary.



Street map of village of Avoca from 1893 Atlas of Livingston County

CHAPTER 19

Murder of Native American Artifact Collector Still Unsolved (Marion Knott)

The 1940s were the heyday for Fairbury area Native American artifact collectors. Ten avid collectors formed the Fairbury Archaeological Society in 1941. One of the charter members of this club was Marion Knott.

The story of the Marion Knott family began with his sixth great-grandfather emigrating from England to Maryland before 1705. Francis Knott (1649-1705) married Eleanor White (1652-1705) and lived in Maryland. The Knott family remained in the Maryland area for several generations before moving to Kentucky and then to Peoria.

The parents of Marion Knott were Loren Albert Knott (1872-1949) and Mary E. Hillard (1880-1961). Loren and Mary Knott had nine children. One of their children was Marion Russel Knott, born in Peoria in 1904.

In the 1910 Census, Loren and Mary Knott lived in Forrest with their four children. These children included Marion, Alma, Raymond, and Earl Knott. Loren Knott's occupation was to repair railroad cars. By the 1920 Census, the Loren Knott family had moved to a farm in Pleasant Ridge Township. The family had increased to six children, and the son Marion was 15 years of age.

In 1929, Marion Knott married Miss Ethel Hill of Weston, Illinois. Marion was 25 years of age when he married Ethel Hill. Miss Ethel Hill was between thirteen and 15 years of age when she married Marion Knott. Dr. Charles S. Davies officiated the wedding in the Fairbury Presbyterian Church. She was the daughter of George B. Hill, a Weston blacksmith. The bride was attended by Miss Juanita Hornsby and the groom by Burbon Downing.

In the 1930 Census, Marion Knott reported that he and his 16-year-old wife Ethel lived with his parents at 405 West Cherry Street in Fairbury.

Thirteen-year-old Marjorie Knott, Marion's sister, and eleven-year-old Lloyd Knott, Marion's brother, lived in the same home.

After seven years of marriage, Marion and Ethel Knott divorced in 1936. They had no children. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Navy Air Service attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. This bombing was the start of World War II for America.

Shortly before the Pearl Harbor attack, the Fairbury Archaeological Society was formed. This group of Fairbury men held a meeting every two weeks. They studied Indian lore in the cold winter months and took field trips in the warmer months. This group sponsored and conducted seven special meetings attended by artifact collectors from Central Illinois. Benjamin Nussbaum was President of the Fairbury Archaeological Society. Vice-President was Burbon Downing. Edgar Zook was Secretary, and Wade Simmons was Treasurer. The group had a total of ten members. Marion Knott was one of the charter club members.

In late 1942, Marion Knott and his brother Lloyd A. Knott enlisted in the Army Quartermaster Corps. Lloyd Knott served until he was discharged in late 1945. Marion Knott only served seven months until he was released in 1943. Marion reported that he was 65 inches tall and weighed 133 pounds when he started military service.

After his military service, Marion Knott moved from Fairbury to Seneca, Illinois. He then worked for about 20 years as a carpenter for DuPont Chemical Company. In June of 1944, Marion married for a second time to a woman named Irene. They were married in Eureka, Illinois. After just one year of marriage, Marion filed for divorce from Irene. He claimed she had slapped him in the face and struck him with a broom. In Marion's divorce request, he asked for custody of their daughter Bonnie Jean Knott. The divorce was eventually granted, but Marion did not get custody of his daughter.

May of 1948 proved to be the most exciting discovery ever made by the Fairbury Archaeological Society. Six miles north of Fairbury, where the South Fork joins the North Fork of the Vermilion River, a burned-out structure was being excavated for a new house. When some artifacts were

found, digging was stopped. P. C. James, the landowner, permitted the Fairbury Archaeological Society to excavate the site carefully.

Edgar Zook, Marion Knott, Guy Slater, Clinton Harris, Willis Harris, Jr., and Don Merrill of Fairbury participated in this archaeological dig. This group carefully used trowels, whisk brooms, and spatulas to excavate the site. They also took measurements and photographs of the project. They found a human skeleton on its left side, its knees flexed and facing the southwest. Evidence indicated the person had suffered a violent death. A two-inch gash, which a blunt-edged weapon could have made, was on the right side of the skull. The lower jaw bone was also broken.

Other artifacts at the site indicated the burial dated back to the Woodland culture, which existed between 500 A.D. and 1,500 A.D. On the skeleton's right arm was a crude, leaf-shaped arrow of quartzite and the middle part of a flat drill. Beneath the skeleton was a five-inch split-bone awl. The awl was very sharp and highly polished from much use. The skeletal remains and the artifacts were donated to the Illinois State Museum.

In 1954, Marion Knott married Margaret C. Parker in Ottawa. Her first husband, Earl McIntire, had died in 1951. Marion was 49 when he married 51-year-old Margaret Parker. In 1975, Margaret died at the age of 72.

In 1980, seventy-six-year-old Marion Knott went missing from his Seneca home. A couple of days later, a farmer found his body under a pile of hay after the farmer noticed some of the hay had been moved. An autopsy found Marion had died from cardiac arrest caused by a brutal assault. Marion was found to have broken ribs, a fractured jaw, and a broken femur. The police speculated it might have been a robbery case because Marion was known to carry large amounts of cash. Within a few weeks of the murder, local authorities administered a polygraph to their only suspect. The suspect passed the polygraph test, and the police had no more suspects.

Marion's extensive collection of Native American artifacts was sold at a public auction at the Ramada Inn in Ottawa held a few months after his death. After 43 years, the murder of one of Fairbury's most avid collectors of Native American artifacts remains unsolved.

From The Private Collection Of The Late Marion Knott

PUBLIC AUCTION

OF GENUINE RELICS AND/OR ARTIFACTS

Sunday, Dec. 7, 1980

At 11:00 A.M.

Preview 9:30 to 11:00 A.M. same day

Auction held in the banquet rooms of the Ramada Inn of Ottawa, Illinois on Rte. 23, south of Interstate 80, exit mile marker 90.

The outstanding pieces from the Marion Knott collection should be known to most of you advanced collectors. These types are not very often found on the market, so be sure to attend!

Auction held in the banquet rooms of the Ramada Inn of Ottawa regardless of weather. Preview until auction begins.

Terms: Cash same day

CLERKS:
Lorene Brown & Lenore Higdon
CASHIERS:
Mr. & Mrs. Jim Reynolds

AUCTIONEER
Bob Higdon —Phone 815-496-2587

Marion Knott's extensive collection of Native American artifacts was sold at public auction a few months after his death.

July 1941 photo of Fairbury Archaeology Club. Seated are Edgar Zook, Secretary of the club, and Burbon Downing, vice-president. Standing are Wade Simmons, treasurer, and Marion Knott. Ben Nussbaum, president of the club, was not present for this photo.

CHAPTER 20

Fairbury Farmer Owned Land in Four Different States (Thomas N. Smith)

Thomas Neal Smith was a very successful farmer. He came to Avoca Township with just $100 of money. During his lifetime, he bought farmland in four different states. At his death, Mr. Smith had accumulated a net worth of over $28 million in today's dollars.

The story of Thomas N. Smith started in Smithfield, Ohio. Thomas was born in 1831 and was the son of Robert S. Smith and Eliza Arnold. He grew up in Ohio and worked as a farm laborer.

In 1850, the U.S. Congress passed the Scrip Warrant Act. This law awarded land grants to veterans of the War of 1812. Most veterans had no interest in moving to the swamplands of Central Illinois. In the 1850s, anyone could purchase land from the U.S. Government for $2.50 per acre. Many veterans who did not want to move to Illinois sold their land rights for about 30 cents per acre to farmers who wanted to farm the land. The new law set off a boom of new pioneer settlers to the Fairbury area.

In 1853, Thomas N. Smith was 22 years old. He decided to emigrate from Ohio to Avoca Township, north of Fairbury. When Mr. Smith arrived in Avoca, he had just $100 in cash. Mr. Smith bought land rights to 160 acres from War of 1812 veteran Asahel Gridley. Mr. Gridley had served in Captain Gidney's Company in the 3rd Regiment of the United States Volunteers. Mr. Smith likely paid Mr. Gridley about $48 for his land claim instead of the official U.S. Government price of $400.

Two years after arriving in Avoca Township, Mr. Smith married Rebecca Alice Gilpin. She was born in Ohio and came to Livingston County with her parents, Samuel Gilpin and Rachel Geringer. Thomas and Rebecca were both 24 years of age when they married. They eventually had nine children.

In 1855, Mr. Smith bought 80 acres of land two miles south of Saunemin from the federal government for $2.50 an acre. The Smith family lived on this farm, and Thomas was the first school treasurer in that township. In 1864, Thomas moved his family from the Saunemin farm to his Avoca Township farm. In 1873, daughter Clara C. Smith died at 14 years of age.

By 1878, Thomas had expanded his farmland holdings to 900 acres valued at $30,000. This value would be equivalent to $805,413 in today's dollars.

In September 1892, eighteen different Fairbury families traveled west on a "harvest excursion" trip to Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Colorado. Some intended to buy land and look over the country; some went on a pleasure trip, while others visited relatives. Some visited relatives living in Fairbury, Nebraska. On this trip, Thomas N. Smith visited Kearney, Nebraska, and purchased farmland there. He was 61 years of age.
By 1893, Mr. Smith had extensive farmland holdings in Avoca Township. Most of his farmland was north of the Vermilion River and east of First Street. In the 1970s, there was an old steel bridge across the Vermilion called "Smith's Iron Bridge." This bridge was next to land owned by T. N. Smith. An old Blade photograph shows the bridge was full of spectators at the canoe races in 1975. The bridge was torn down in the 1980s and was not replaced.

Around 1900, Isaac Walton and his brother J.W. Walton owned the Walton Bros. department store in Fairbury. This store was very profitable, and Isaac Walton needed somewhere to invest his profits. Isaac chose to invest in rice-growing farmland in the Stuttgart, Arkansas, area. Isaac Walton became the single largest owner of rice-growing farmland in Arkansas. Thomas N. Smith also invested in rice-growing farmland in the Stuttgart region.

In 1902, Thomas N. Smith was 71 years of age and was experiencing some health issues. He started spending the winters in Santa Cruz, California. Mr. Smith eventually bought California farmland and relocated to California.

Back in the 1905 era, Merkle & Sons of Peoria provided many beautiful monuments to the Fairbury Graceland Cemetery. Some Fairbury residents

with ornate monuments made by this company included William Gosline, Jacob Oppy, Thomas Bodley, Bert Carter, and Mr. and Mrs. Abt.

In 1908, Mr. Smith died at his home in Santa Cruz at the age of 76 years. Mr. Smith owned farmland in Fairbury, Arkansas, Nebraska, and California. The probate courts valued his estate at over $1 million. This estate value would equal $28.8 million in today's dollars. Mr. Smith's body was transported from California to Fairbury, and he was buried with a fancy tombstone by Merkle & Sons in Graceland Cemetery along Seventh Street. The monument had a 27-inch diameter stone ball on top with a weight of 1,000 pounds. This monument can be seen from South Seventh Street across from the East Chestnut Street intersection.

In 1909, Mrs. Smith died at the age of 78 in Santa Cruz. Her body was returned to Fairbury for burial with her husband at Graceland. Her visitation was held at John P. Cook's Undertaking Parlor in Fairbury.

In 1910, the Smith family noted the heavy stone ball on the Smith's monument had rotated two inches since it was erected less than two years earlier. Charles Merkle of Merkle & Sons in Peoria visited Graceland to figure out why it rotated, but he gave up. A reader of the Cornell Journal speculated it spun because of different freezing and thawing rates on the north versus the south side of the ball. In 2023, the granite ball still sits correctly on top of the large gravestone.

Mr. Smith started his adult life as an Ohio farm laborer. When he emigrated from Ohio to the Fairbury area, he had less than $100 in cash. Thomas N. Smith became a very successful farmer who owned farmland in Illinois, Arkansas, Nebraska, and California. He died with a net worth of $28.8 million in today's dollars. His unique tombstone with a large 1,000-pound granite ball that mysteriously rotated in 1910 is still intact today in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery.

Grave stone of Thomas N. Smith with 1,000 pound ball that mysteriously rotated in 1910.

1975 Blade photo of Smith Iron Bridge full of people watching the canoe race. The bridge was torn down and never replaced.

CHAPTER 21

DeMoss Family Early Pioneers

The DeMoss family was among the early pioneer families to settle in Livingston County. The story of this family began with the birth of James Henry DeMoss Sr. in 1786 in West Virginia. James H. DeMoss Sr. was the son of John K. DeMoss (1755-1814) and Martha LaHuff (1794-1852).

In 1808, James H. DeMoss married Nancy Hamilton in Ohio. James and Nancy were both 22 years of age when they married. James and Nancy DeMoss had nine children.

The War of 1812 lasted from 1812 until 1815 and was fought by the United States of America and the United Kingdom. James H. DeMoss was 26 years of age when this War began in 1812. James H. DeMoss served as a Private in Captain Joseph Rockhold's Company from Ross County, Ohio.

According to the 1878 Livingston County history book by LeBaron, John K. DeMoss, father of James H. DeMoss Sr., originally came from Virginia and settled at the mouth of the Miami River in Ohio and helped to build a fort there. In 1814, near the end of the War of 1812, John K. DeMoss was killed by Native Americans. John K. DeMoss was 58 when he was killed in Ohio.

Livingston County was formed in 1837. In 1841, the James and Nancy DeMoss family relocated to Avoca Township, north of present-day Fairbury. James H. DeMoss Sr. was 55 when he moved his family to Avoca Township.

In September 1847, the Livingston County Court contracted with Henry Jones, J. H. DeMoss, and Philip Rollings to build a bridge over the river at Pontiac for $450. The three men proceeded to build the bridge. Unfortunately, in March of 1849, a freshet carried the new bridge away, according to the 1878 Livingston County history book by LeBaron. A freshet is a great rise or overflowing of a stream caused by heavy rains or melted snow. Mr. Rollings and Mr. DeMoss were ordered to save what they could of the new bridge and rebuild it.

James H. DeMoss Sr. built the first grain mill in Pontiac and helped build the first courthouse in Livingston County. He died in 1852 at the age of 66. His wife, Nancy DeMoss, died in 1853 at the age of 67. James H. DeMoss Sr. and his wife, Nancy DeMoss, were buried in the Patty Cemetery southeast of Pontiac.

Between 1830 when Valentine Darnell became the first settler in the area, and 1852, very few families lived in Livingston County. Central Illinois was swampland, and it had no railroads. In 1850, Congress passed a script law that gave primarily veterans of the War of 1812 free land in Illinois. Most of these veterans had no interest in moving to the swamps of Illinois. These veterans sold their land rights for about 30 cents an acre, well below the official federal government land price of $2.50 per acre. The 1850 law created a stampede of new settlers into Livingston County between 1852 and 1860.

Because there were relatively few families living in Livingston County in that era, the children of the early pioneer settlers had no choice but to marry the children of other early pioneer settlers.

Sanford Sparks (1808-1859) was one of the early settlers in Avoca Township. Alexander DeMoss (1810-1880) was one of the sons of James and Nancy DeMoss. Alexander DeMoss married Sarah Sparks, one of the daughters of Sanford Sparks. William DeMoss (1828-1895), another son of James and Nancy DeMoss, married Charlotte A. Sparks (1829-1910), another daughter of Sanford Sparks.

James H. DeMoss Jr. (1808-1852), son of James H. DeMoss Sr., married Margaret Nace (1809-1868). One of the daughters of James and Margaret DeMoss, Emily DeMoss (1848-1905), married Thomas "Wiley" Sparks (1846-1930), who was the son of Sanford Sparks. One of the sons of James and Margaret DeMoss, Henry J. DeMoss (1830-1905), married Mary A. Popejoy (1932-1889), daughter of early Livingston County settler Nathan Popejoy (1784-1845).

Leander DeMoss (1869-1942) was a great-grandson of James H. DeMoss Sr. He married Olive Sparks (1871-1959), who was the daughter of Wiley Sparks.

In 1878, six different DeMoss families were living in Fairbury. These included Thomas, Asa, William, Levi, James H., and Henry DeMoss.

Tragedy struck a descendant of James H. DeMoss Sr. in 1924. Fifteen-year-old Thelma Lucile DeMoss was the daughter of Leander DeMoss (1869-1942) and Olive J. Sparks (1871-1959). Thelma and two girlfriends decided to swim across the Munz sandpit located in the present-day Indian Creek Golf Course. The three girls crossed the pond and decided to swim back. Thelma did not make it back across and disappeared below the water. Rescuers found her body, but she could not be revived. Thelma was the great-great-granddaughter of James H. DeMoss Sr.

Another descendant of James H. DeMoss Sr. was Beatrice DeMoss. She was another great-great-granddaughter of James H. DeMoss Sr. Beatrice married Philip Tetley (1906-1956). Bea and her husband managed two restaurants, the Crossroads Cafe in Forrest and the Honegger House Hotel and Cafe in Fairbury. Later, she was employed by the National Bank of Fairbury for 25 years, retiring in 1979. Bea Tetley died in 2014 at the age of 96.

In the early phases of Fairbury area history, the DeMoss name was one of the most common names in the area. Although the DeMoss name has almost disappeared in current events, the family has made significant contributions to the development of the Fairbury area since 1841.

Dolly Madison had the Gilbert Stuart of George Washington removed and saved just before the British burned the White House during the War of 1812.

CHAPTER 22

Fairbury Was Motorcycle Capitol of the World in the 1910s

Fairbury has often been referred to as the "Motorcycle Capital of the World" in the era of the 1910s. The early history of motorcycles in Fairbury helps to explain why motorcycle ownership was so widespread in Fairbury.

The first mention of motorcycles in the Blade newspaper was back in 1908. In July 1908, the Blade reported that Chatsworth rural mail carrier John Sluth had purchased a motorcycle for delivering the mail.

In 1909, the Blade reported that Emerson Mitchell, a Fairbury rural mail carrier, had purchased a motorcycle for his mail route. With the bike, Mr. Mitchell could finish his mail route in three hours with a maximum speed of 70 miles per hour.

The 1910 Blade had two articles about motorcycles. The first mention was an advertisement for E. C. Van Loon in Streator, selling Indian motorcycles. No record could be found of Fairbury having an Indian motorcycle dealership. The Blade also reported nine motorcycle races at the Woodford County Fair held in El Paso.

In 1911, the number of mentions of motorcycles in the Blade exploded to twelve different articles. According to a 1911 issue of New American Motorcyclist and Bicyclist magazine, Joseph E. Carrithers, of the law firm of Carrithers & Carrithers, was planning on creating a Fairbury motorcycle club.

In April of 1911, James "Kentucky Jim" Seifers and William "Pete" Murray got drunk on whiskey at the John Winslow farm and got into a fight. Mr. Murray chewed on the ear of Kentucky Jim Seifers. Mr. Seifers went to Fairbury and swore out a warrant to arrest Pete Murray. Mr. Murray fled to Forrest after the fight. Deputy Sheriff Codlin rode with Charles Bradley on Bradley's motorcycle. They made it to Forrest in 10

minutes and arrested Mr. Murray. This event was the first reported use of a motorcycle for law enforcement purposes.

Also, in April of 1911, the Fairbury Harley-Davidson dealership owned by Purdum & Bradley sold four motorcycles. The customers were Carl Vance, George Vance, Reuben Fuller, and John Phillips. This article was the first mention of a Harley-Davidson dealership being in Fairbury.

In June of 1911, the first advertisement for a Fairbury motorcycle dealership was published. Purdum & Bradley ran an ad for their Harley-Davidson motorcycles. They said a good motorcycle could do the work of three horses at a small fraction of the upkeep of one horse. The ad also stated that mail carriers had proven the benefits of motorcycles.

Also, in June, the Blade published its first story about a motorcycle accident. Mrs. Mowry and Mrs. H. A. Foster drove their horse-drawn buggy to a Methodist church picnic. Emerson Mitchell, a mail carrier, ran his motorcycle into the buggy when it started to turn into the Dominy pasture. Nobody was hurt in this accident.

In July of 1911, the first speeding ticket was issued to a motorcycle driver. Gene Morrison rode his motorcycle too fast down Locust Street and was fined 10 dollars plus 2 dollars court costs. The total fine of $12 in 1911 would be equivalent to $387 in today's dollars.

Andy Walker, a Cropsey harness maker, purchased a new Harley-Davidson motorcycle in Fairbury in July 1911. In August, Bud Codlin crashed his motorcycle while riding to Piper City. He did not remember what happened. He speculated that sometimes he fell asleep driving a horse and buggy, and he may have fallen asleep on the motorcycle.

Also in August of 1911, the Fairbury Excelsior dealership owned by Carl Goudy and Mr. Keck sold twin-cylinder Excelsior motorcycles to Dirk Hanks and Clark Hanks. They also sold a motorcycle to Carl Wilson of Colfax.

In September 1911, Elmer Wurzberger's motorcycle caught fire while riding it with his friend Will Goudy. Elmer had built the motorcycle and

had been riding it for one year. The fire destroyed the motorcycle. Elmer was able to get off the motorcycle before his clothing caught on fire.

The Fairbury Fair was held in September 1911. The Blade published four different articles about motorcycle racing during the Fair. 1911 was the first year that motorcycle racing was held at the Fairbury Fair. The Excelsior team had Carl Goudy, Will Goudy, Mr. Ramsey, and Elmer Wurzberger. The Harley-Davidson team was Mr. Morrison, Mr. Hiday, Mr. Purdum, and Mr. Bradley. Carl Goudy placed third in this race.

The 1912 Blade only had one mention of motorcycles. Mr. E. F. Cavanah ran an ad for his Indian motorcycle dealership in Sibley. The June 26, 1913 issue of the Motorcycle Illustrated Magazine published an article with photographs of the Fairbury Motorcycle Club. The club recently had 85 members who rode from Fairbury to Pontiac. The club thought they would have had 125 members if the weather was not threatening to rain. John L. Purdum, the Harley-Davidson dealer, hosted a dinner for the club. Fairbury claimed to have the largest motorcycle club in the State of Illinois.

The July 1913 Blade reported the first motorcycle-related fatality. Thomas Holley was a business partner of Fairbury native Elvin Crouch. Mr. Holley proposed marriage and gave Miss Zina Ficken of Bloomington a diamond engagement ring. The next day, Miss Ficken sat on her front porch waiting for her fiancée to arrive. Tragically, Mr. Holley's motorcycle collided with a Bloomington street car less than 100 feet from Miss Ficken's porch. He was killed, and Miss Ficken witnessed the terrible accident.

At the 1913 Fairbury Fair, Will Goudy finished 2nd in the motorcycle race. In 1913, an article was also published about Carl Goudy racing nationally and winning races.

On September 12, 1915, Carl Goudy won the most prestigious motorcycle race in the United States. Carl won the 300-mile Chicago Maywood race with an average speed of 86 MPH.

A few months later, Will Goudy, younger brother of Carl Goudy, was killed while doing practice laps at the Bakersfield, California, race track. After this accident, Carl Goudy gave up motorcycle racing.

Several factors explain why Fairbury was called the Motorcycle Capital of the World. The number one reason was that Fairbury had two world-class motorcycle racers in Carl Goudy and his brother Will Goudy. A second reason was that Fairbury had two motorcycle dealerships in 1911 for Excelsior and Harley-Davidson. No evidence of an Indian motorcycle dealer in Fairbury was found, but there were dealers nearby in Sibley and Streator.

The first motorcycle races were held in 1911 at the Fairbury Fair. Although there were only six motorcycles in the race, spectators at the Fair probably purchased motorcycles after watching the motorcycle races. Fairbury was also only 100 miles from the Excelsior factory in Chicago. Some Fairbury Excelsior owners took their motorcycles to the Chicago factory for repairs.

A 1913 magazine article reported that Fairbury had the largest motorcycle club in the State of Illinois with 125 members. This claim may have later been exaggerated to say Fairbury was the Motorcycle Capitol of the World. Fairbury's population was 2,500 citizens in 1910. Having at least 125 motorcycle owners in a town with a population of only 2,500 was an extraordinary phenomenon.

These motorcycles were in the southwest corner of Veteran's Memorial Park with the old City Hall at the upper right-hand corner of the photo. Dave's Supermarket now stands where the old house and one-story building are shown just south of the railroad tracks. Photo was circa 1912.

CHAPTER 23

Fairbury's Brick Grain Elevator Controversy

In the 1880s, Fairbury suffered many fires. In that era, Fairbury was experiencing a town feud. The opposing factions were the West Enders, associated with John Marsh, and the East Enders, aligned with Bruce Amsbury. The city feud degenerated to the point where the two sides set fire to their opponent's business buildings. Fairbury had so many fires that insurance companies raised their annual premiums to five percent of the building's value compared to less than one percent rates today. As a result, only some business owners could afford fire insurance.

In 1884, Walton Bros. owned an elevator at the southeast corner of Locust and First Street. It burned to the ground, and the fire jumped across Locust Street to the north side and burned the first Walton Bros. department store. Another major fire occurred in 1896 when the Walton Bros. department store at the northwest corner of Locust and Third Streets burned completely.

The Sanborn Insurance Company made maps of Fairbury for the years 1885, 1892, 1898, 1906, and 1911. Two different grain elevators are shown on the 1892 Sanborn map. Frank Churchill owned a massive grain elevator complex located on both sides of the railroad tracks between First and Second Streets. Dr. S. M. Barnes owned the other 30,000-bushel capacity elevator located at the southeast corner of Fifth and Locust Streets.

In May of 1899, Dr. Barnes sold his grain elevator to the Shearer brothers. The three brothers were John L. Shearer, Joseph P. Shearer, and Elmer S. Shearer. These three brothers had previously operated grain elevators at Cullom and Kempton. They named their Fairbury elevator the Shearer Grain Co.

The 1906 Sanborn map shows there were three different grain elevators in Fairbury. Churchill's elevator was still in business at the exact location as shown on the 1898 Sanborn Map. The Barnes elevator had been replaced by a new 60,000-bushel capacity elevator built by the Shearer Grain Co.

Also, in 1903, N. B. Claudon & Son erected a 160,000-bushel capacity grain elevator on the south side of the tracks on Walnut Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets.

The July 1901 edition of the Grain and Farm Service Centers magazine published an article about a major controversy involving a new grain elevator to be built in Fairbury. The article recounted that the Fairbury City Council had rejected the plans for a new wood elevator and insisted the new elevator be designed to be artistic and fire-proof. The Fairbury City Council members had grown weary of the many previous fires that had plagued Fairbury.

To fulfill the City Council's requirement for a fire-proof elevator, the owner hired the firm of C. M. Seckner & Co. to design the new elevator. A few large cities required new grain elevators to be fire-proof, and Seckner specialized in the design of grain elevators constructed of wood, concrete, or steel. The new elevator for Fairbury was designed to be encased in a brick veneer, with a slate roof and galvanized iron on the top. The magazine article included an end and sectional view of the proposed brick elevator.

Unfortunately, the article in the 1901 elevator trade magazine does not mention the identity of the Fairbury businessman who wanted to build the new elevator. The 1898 and 1906 Sanborn map information indicates the new proposed brick elevator had to be for either the Shearer Grain Co. or N. B. Claudon & Son. Comparing the 1901 drawings for the proposed new brick elevator to the two elevators shown on the 1906 Sanborn map indicates the owner was most likely to have been the Shearer Grain Co.

In April of 1902, the Blade reported that the Shearer Grain Co. had commenced to tear down the old elevator to prepare for building a new elevator. The Blade noted the new structure would be "a fine modern elevator."

The 1906 Sanborn maps reported that both the Shearer Grain Co. and N. B. Claudon & Son grain elevators were built in 1903. In 1904, the Grain Dealers Journal of Chicago, Illinois, published a book with architectural plans for many Illinois grain elevators. This book has a report and drawings about the controversial brick elevator proposed for Fairbury,

Illinois. Apparently, the grain elevator owner and the Fairbury City Council reached a compromise on the design of the new elevator. The owner wanted a new wooden elevator to be built because it was cheaper than a brick elevator. The City Council wanted a brick elevator, making it less likely to catch fire. The drawing of the actual elevator that was built has the lower part of the building encased in bricks, but the upper part is conventional wood construction. Unfortunately, there are no known photographs of the elevators owned by the Shearer Grain Co. or Claudon & Son to verify the actual design of the finished elevator.

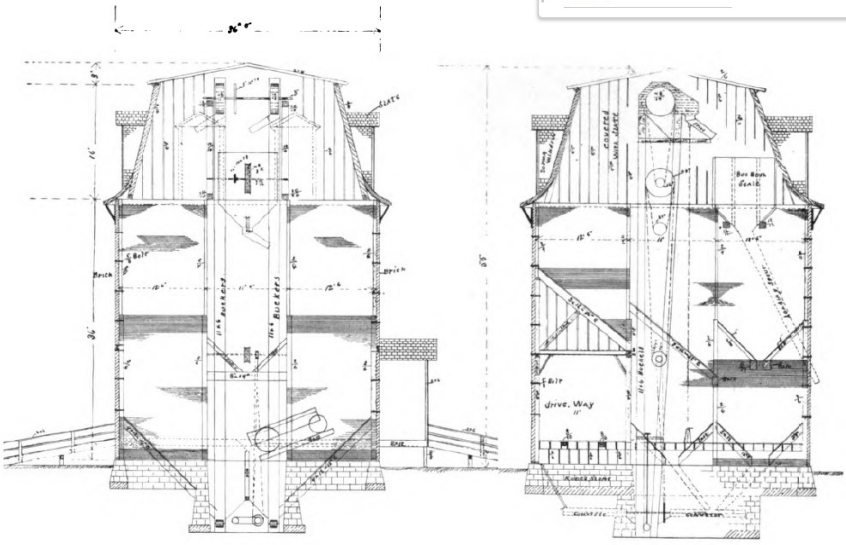
A new illustration of the proposed brick elevator was created using the drawings shown in the 1901 edition of the Grain and Farm Service Centers magazine. If this brick elevator were built per the proposed design, the resultant brick elevator would have a very unusual and distinctive design. Very few brick elevators were ever built in the United States.

Honeggers & Co. later bought the old Churchill elevator and a large wood grain storage building where Addis Auto Parts is now located. In February of 1949, the entire facility burned to the ground. This structure was one of the last wooden grain elevators in Fairbury. Almost all grain elevators and bins are built today using steel and concrete. The new elevators are relatively fire-proof compared to wood elevators. These new elevators are still prone to explosions of the fine particles from the grain.

If Fairbury had built the all-brick elevator with a slate roof, it might still be standing today. The building might be a tourist attraction since so few brick elevators still stand today.

Artist's rendition of what the all-brick elevator would have looked like back in 1902.

NOTE: When the author drew this elevator in Sketchup, the wagon entrance and exit doors were forgotten to be drawn. The actual drawing is shown below with the wagon entrance and exit doorways.



End and Side Sectional Views of Artistic Grain Elevator to be Built at Fairbury, Ill.

CHAPTER 24

Fairbury Area Creeks and Rivers

The first settler in Livingston County was Valentine Darnall. He settled south of Fairbury in 1830 near what is now Indian Creek. In that era, everyone knew that a good farm site had plenty of timber and was located on a creek or stream. Every earlier settler in Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie Townships chose to live on Indian Creek or the Vermilion River.

The glaciers from the Ice Age leveled the land in Central Illinois. A pleasant byproduct of the glaciers was the creation of some of the most productive farmland on the planet. Unfortunately, there were no hills to drain this flat prairie, and most of it became swampy. There were substantial swampy areas north of Piper City down to Oliver's Grove, three miles south of Chatsworth.

One history book that describes this swampy land is the 1884 Historical Atlas of Ford County by J. H. Beers & Co. This history book recounts the summer of 1856 was very hot and dry. Around September 1, 1856, a prairie fire started in southern Ford County. The winds that day were blowing from the south to the north. The fire spread at a frightening speed. The timber in Oliver's Grove, especially the down timber, was nearly all destroyed, and it was considered that the loss of wood that Mr. Oliver sustained must have run into the thousands of cords.

The fire spread north for about 30 miles until it hit the Kankakee River. The low sloughs with a lot of grass continued to burn for three months until the ground froze in the fall. Some of the land areas were burned so severely that this land still showed the ill effects 28 years later when the 1884 history book was written.

Many of the creeks and rivers in Central Illinois were initially connected to a swamp or slough. Wikipedia recounts there are two different Vermilion Rivers in the State of Illinois. The Wabash tributary flows south, while the other Vermilion River flows north to the Illinois River.

The north-flowing Vermilion and south-flowing Vermilion rivers lie along a straight line connecting Oglesby and Danville. The two rivers drain what was once an upland marsh near Roberts, Illinois. Drainage ditches have extended the two rivers to nearly connect them at their headwaters. The rivers may share a common name because early settlers regarded them as a single river that flowed in two directions. The rivers may have served as a canoe route between the Illinois River and the Wabash River for Native Americans and early settlers, with a portage through the marshes near Roberts.

The oldest known map of the Fairbury area, which shows all the creek and river names, is the 1876 map of Livingston County from the Atlas of the State of Illinois by the Union Atlas Co. This book shows the South Branch of the Vermilion River started at Turtle Pond by Oliver's Grove, three miles south of Chatsworth. The map in this book does not show the South Branch starting in Roberts, Illinois, and leading to Turtle Pond. It is possible this section was drained before the 1876 map was made.

The South Branch of the Vermilion left Oliver's Grove and flowed northwest to the west side of Forrest, Illinois. The South Branch continued to flow northwest to what is now the Fugate Woods Nature Preserve, located 2 1/2 miles northeast of Fairbury.

Indian Creek was named after the Kickapoo tribe that lived south of Fairbury from 1828 until 1830. This creek originates south of Fairbury and is a tributary of the South Branch of the Vermilion River. Indian Creek empties into the South Branch of the Vermilion just north of the Fugate Woods Nature Preserve.

The North Branch of the Vermilion originates east of Fairbury. It crosses U.S. Route 47 about 3 1/2 miles south of Saunemin. About one mile west of Route 47, the Five Mile Creek drains into the North Branch of the Vermilion. Five Mile Creek drains Saunemin and Sullivan Townships. In 1876, there was a significant grove of trees at this intersection point named Five Mile Grove.

The North Branch of the Vermilion continues to flow west until it meets the South Branch of the Vermilion about five miles north of Fairbury. Less

than one mile after the North and South Branches combine, the Felkey Slough empties into the Vermilion River. On the 1876 map, the Felkey Slough or creek originated 3 1/2 miles east of the village of Cayuga, and it flowed south into the Vermilion. The Vermilion River flows west to McDowell and northwest to Pontiac.

The 1876 map also identified timber areas along these waterways. The timber areas often extended half a mile on each side of the waterways.

Before the arrival of the early settlers to the area, Native Americans and their ancestors inhabited these lands. They lived here from the end of the Ice Age about 10,000 years ago until they were forced to leave Illinois in 1832. Many of these native peoples chose to live next to these waterways. Creeks or rivers could be used to travel by canoe, and they could fish for food. There were also periodic raging prairie fires, and these people could shelter in a waterway. Artifacts such as arrowheads from prehistoric peoples are often found along these waterways.

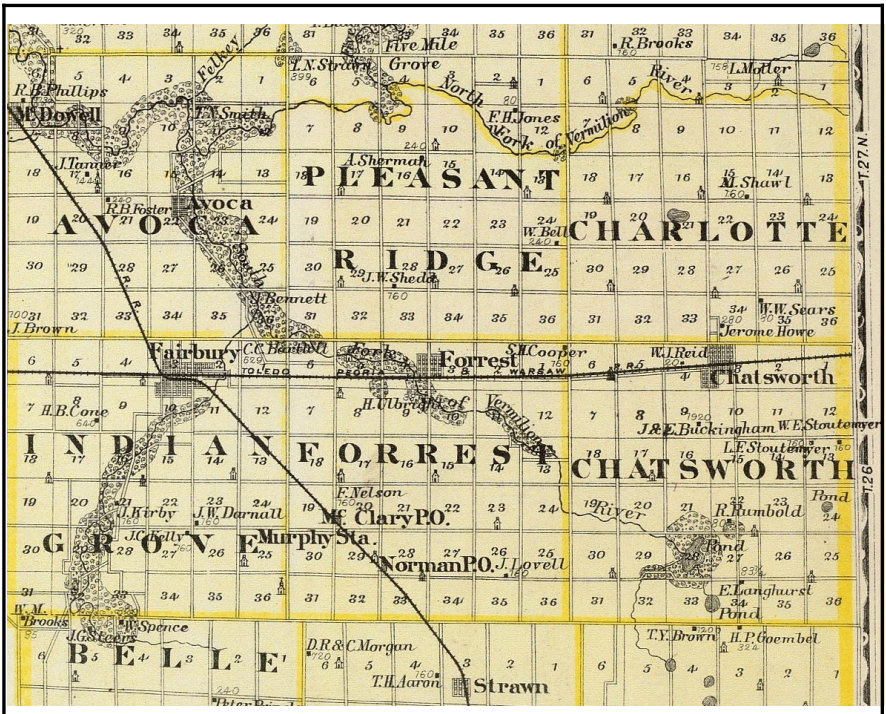
The Kickapoo tribe lived south of Fairbury on Indian Creek from 1828 until 1830. In 1830, they moved their 650 tribe members to a site three miles south of Chatsworth, later called Oliver's Grove. Oliver's Grove also had the South Branch of the Vermilion in that area. In 1832, the Kickapoo were forced by the government to leave the state of Illinois.

In 1948, members of the Fairbury Archaeological Society excavated a site on the north side of the Vermilion River at the point where the South Fork of the Vermilion joins the North Fork. During this excavation, they found the skeleton of a male about five feet six inches tall.
The Native American was determined to be from the Woodland period between 500 A.D. and 1,500 A.D. The remains were from the Woodland period because of the method of burial, the scarcity of grave goods, and the cord-imprinted potsherds.

On the skeleton's right arm was a crude, leaf-shaped arrow of quartzite and the middle part of a flat drill, and a five-inch, split-bone awl was found beneath the skeleton. The awl was sharp and highly polished from much use.

This person died due to someone striking his skull with a blunt piece of stone. The person's jaw was also broken. The excavation team donated the remains and the artifacts to the Illinois State Museum.

The waterways in the Fairbury area have played an essential role in our local history. Native Americans and their ancestors lived along these waterways since the Ice Age ended 10,000 years ago. Early pioneer settlers all established their homes along one of these waterways.



1876 Map showing the names of all the creeks and rivers in the Fairbury area.

CHAPTER 25

Wade Family Played an Important Role in Fairbury History

Many Fairbury residents remember Wade's Drug Store and John Wade owning the Keck's Insurance Agency. The story of the Wade family began with the birth of William E. Martin (1797-1863) on the Isle of Man. This island is located between England and Ireland. William married Mary Ann Quayle (1804-1884) on the Isle of Man, and they had nine children.

James Wade (1824-1886) was also born on the Isle of Man. He married Ann Jane Martin, the daughter of William and Mary Martin. They were married at Donglass on the Isle of Man in 1848.

William and Mary Martin emigrated from the Isle of Man to Peoria in 1855. Two years later, in 1857, they moved to Indian Grove Township. William farmed in the Fairbury area.

James and Ann Wade emigrated from the Isle of Man to Indian Grove Township in 1857. James Wade farmed until he moved into Fairbury in 1872. In 1873, James Wade ran the Wade & Mahoney livery stable in Fairbury. In 1881, at the age of 57, he sailed back to the Isle of Man to visit his boyhood home. In 1886, at the age of 62, James Wade left his home to work at the stable. In the afternoon, he suffered a stroke at the barn. He was moved to his house and passed away that evening. Ann Wade and nine children survived after the death of James Wade.

One of the nine children of James and Ann Wade was Phillip Wade (1854-1931). Phillip was born on the Isle of Man. When Phillip was three years old, he came with his parents to Indian Grove Township. Phillip grew up in the Fairbury area.

In 1876, at the age of 22, Phillip went to work for J. F. Blackburn and his firm of Blackburn & Co. The other partner in the firm was John Zimmerman. Phillip first worked as a clerk at that drugstore. After a few months of working as a clerk, Mr. Blackburn withdrew from the firm, and

it was renamed Zimmerman & Co. Phillip Wade was made a partner in the firm.

In 1881, at the age of 27, Phillip Wade married Miss Charlotte Cool of Sterling, Illinois. They had four children in Fairbury. In 1891, John Zimmerman sold his interest in the drug store to William C. Wade (1864-1914), the younger brother of Phillip Wade. They changed the company name to the Wade Bros. drug store. In 1896, William C. Wade left the business. Phillip Wade continued the drug store, and his son James W. Wade (1886-1953) eventually joined the firm.

One of Phillip Wade's hobbies was beautiful horses. He was a horse fancier and was very skillful with them. He always had one or more fine horses in his possession. Phillip Wade also managed the Opera House at the northwest corner of Locust and Fifth Streets. When the new Opera House was built in 1923 at the southeast corner of Maple and Third Streets, Phillip Wade also managed that Opera House for a few years.

In 1931, Phillip Wade passed away at the age of 77 in his home at 504 South Fifth Street. To honor the memory of Phillip Wade, all Fairbury businesses closed for one hour on the day of his funeral.

James William Wade, a son of Phillip Wade, was born and raised in Fairbury. He graduated with the class of 1906 from Fairbury Township High School. After high school, James W. Wade attended the Northwestern School of Pharmacy. After completing pharmacy school, he went to work for his father at his drug store located at the northeast corner of Locust and Third Street. James W. Wade married Miss Lura Potter in 1911. James and Lura had one child, John Potter Wade, born in 1916 in Fairbury.

When his father, Phillip Wade, died in 1931, James W. Wade continued the business until he sold it to Shelby Wharton in 1949. At that point in time, the Wade family had been involved with a Fairbury drugstore for almost 75 years. James W. Wade passed away in 1953 at the age of 66.

John P. Wade, son of James W. Wade, grew up in Fairbury. After graduating from Fairbury Township High School, John attended Lake Forest College and graduated in 1937. Before World War II, he worked at

the Farmer's State Bank in Fairbury. When John P. Wade enlisted in the military in March of 1942, he listed his wife as Valerie C. Wade. During World War II, John served with the Air Force Training Command and then with the Ferry Division of the Air Transport Command. He held the rank of Technical Sergeant.

After the war ended, John P. Wade returned to his job at the Farmer's State Bank in Fairbury. In 1948, he left the bank and started working at the Keck Insurance Agency. He then purchased the agency from Karl Keck in 1962.

In 1970, John P. and Valerie C. Wade were divorced. They had no children. In December of 1971, John married Tula H. Kalis in Fairbury. John P. Wade sold the agency in 1977 and retired. John and Tula Wade divided their time between Fairbury and St. Petersburg, Florida, in retirement. John was a member of the Fairbury American Legion Post. Mr. Wade was a member and had been an elder of the First Presbyterian Church of Fairbury. John was also a charter member of the Prairie Lands Foundation.

Tula Wade passed away in 1983 at the age of 56. John P. Wade passed away at age 73 in 1989. John and Tula had no children. They left 75 percent of their estate to the Prairie Lands Foundation in their joint will. John and Tula bequeathed 20 percent to his alma mater, Lake Forest College, and the last five percent to the Fairbury First United Presbyterian Church. The money left to Prairie Lands Foundation was designated to be used for cultural, recreational, and community services for Fairbury.

The Wade family played an essential role in Fairbury's history for four generations. They ran a drug store in Fairbury for almost 75 years and operated the Keck's Insurance Agency. The generosity of John P. and Tula Wade is still being used to improve the quality of life of Fairbury citizens under the management of the Prairie Lands Foundation.

James Wade (1824-1886), his wife Ann Martin (1826--1897) and two of their daughters.

CHAPTER 26

The Location of the Ghost Town of Avoca Village

The story of the ghost town of Avoca began with the arrival of the William McDowell family in 1832. In that era, "good land" had to have timber and be next to a creek or river. The North Branch of the Vermilion River ran west from the Piper City area and met with the South Branch about five miles north of Fairbury. The South Branch flowed northwest from Oliver's Grove, three miles south of Chatsworth, and combined with Indian Creek, where Fugate Woods is now located.

The McDowells chose to locate on the South Fork of the Vermilion River about a mile south of where it meets the North Fork. The 1838 surveyor's map of Avoca Township shows large timber areas along the South Fork of the Vermilion River.

William McDowell established the Avoca Cemetery across the creek from the village of Avoca. Susan Philips was the first person buried in this cemetery in 1833. Unfortunately, William McDowell died in 1834 at the age of 48. Mr. McDowell was buried in the Avoca Cemetery.

The 1878 Livingston County history book by LeBaron recounted the first post office was established in 1840 and was called Avoca. Nicholas Hefner was the first Postmaster. The petition to obtain this post office was prepared by Abraham Beard, a schoolmaster in the neighborhood. This petition should have been mailed to the United States Postmaster General. Mr. Beard improperly prepared the petition and addressed it to the "Speaker of the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Illinois." Many pioneer settlers who signed the petition did not find the mistake when they signed the document because they were illiterate and signed the petition with an X. Once the post office was approved for Avoca, it fell between the post office route between Danville and Ottawa.

In 1854, Judge Woodford G. McDowell, son of William McDowell, laid out the village of Avoca. Judge McDowell owned the land the new town was located on. Amos Edwards, the Livingston County Surveyor,

surveyed the village. The village of Avoca was located just east and south of where the Ocoya Blacktop now intersects First Street from Fairbury.

The 1893 Atlas of Livingston County contains a street map of the village of Avoca. There were two east-west streets named Bluff and Clark Streets. There were two north-south streets named State and Main Streets. Some land was allocated for a public square in the center of the village.

The oldest known map of the Fairbury area showing roads is the 1876 map of Livingston County from the Atlas of the State of Illinois by the Union Atlas Co. This map shows the location of the village of Avoca. The roads in 1876 were significantly different than today's roads. In 1876, a road ran on the west side of the South Branch of the Vermilion River. There was also no First Street running north from Fairbury.

Once the village of Avoca was established in 1854, it soon became a thriving community. Three of the McDowell brothers opened a general store with the post office. They also set up a steam-powered sawmill with stones for grinding corn into meal. Several other stores followed, including a shingle mill, blacksmith shop, hotel, and schoolhouse. The McDowell family was Methodist. They built the "Pioneer Church" in 1856. It was a wood-framed building that was 32 by 50 feet with a sixteen-foot high ceiling.

In 1857, the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad ran its new tracks from Peoria east to the Indiana border. Caleb Patton convinced Octave Chanute, the railroad engineer, to run the railroad tracks through his farm by offering the railroad half of the new city lots. Fairbury was formed as a new town.

Citizens of the village of Avoca quickly realized the new railroad and the establishment of Fairbury spelled the end of their town. Citizens started moving their houses from Avoca to Fairbury and McDowell. In her Stuffed Clubs & Antimaccassars book, Alma Lewis James recounted that the rear portion of the house at 110 West Maple Street was hauled to Fairbury from Avoca. The front part of the house was added in 1869 to the rear portion that came from Avoca. Many years ago, the Abe Filley family lived in this home in Fairbury.

Around 1859, Judge McDowell started the town of Fairbury, Nebraska. He named this new Nebraska town after his hometown of Fairbury, Illinois. Judge McDowell moved the steam-powered sawmill from Avoca to the new town of Fairbury, Nebraska. It was used to mill lumber to build Fairbury, Nebraska. In 1872, the Avoca post office was discontinued.

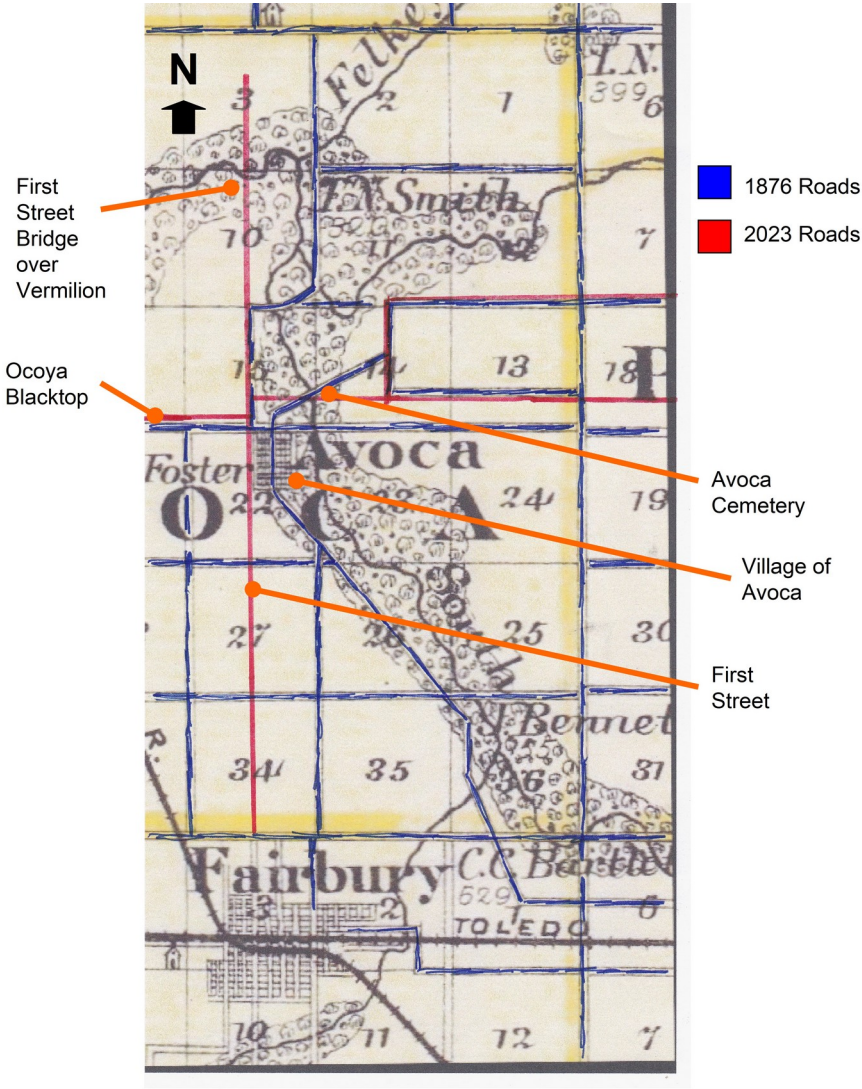
By the time the map of Avoca Township was made for the 1893 Atlas of Livingston County, First Street had been created. This street ran north from Fairbury and continued through a bridge at the Vermilion River. The road ran through the west border of the Village of Avoca.

The village of Avoca had a succession of three churches. The third church was built next to the Avoca Cemetery around 1905. The Fairbury carpenters who built this church were C. L. Mowry, W. L. Waggoner, G. B. Brownson, and James Smail.

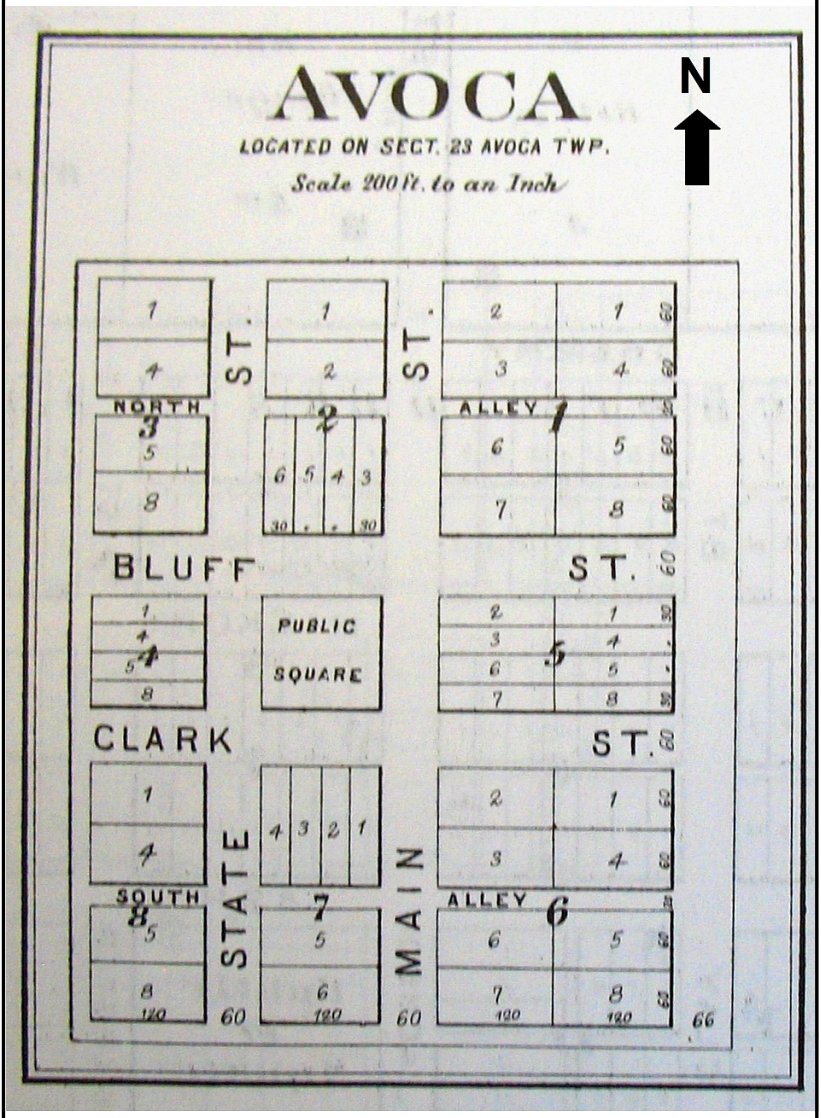
In 1935, the Blade reported the officers of the Illinois Methodist church voted to sell the Avoca church building to the East Bay Institute and East Bay Camp located on Lake Bloomington. This Bloomington organization had purchased several like buildings during the past few years. They moved them to Lake Bloomington, where the lumber was made over into other structures and used by various church denominations. When the churches or their organizations do not use these buildings, they are rented to other parties.

The wood from the demolished church was in fine condition. It was in such good shape and so well put together that it was cut into sections and hauled away on large motor trucks without tearing it apart. The siding and uprights were of white pine, remarkably free from knots and as bright looking as if they had just come from the mills.

After the last church was torn down in 1935, the only remaining significant remnant of the village of Avoca was the Avoca Cemetery. The site of the town reverted to agricultural farmland. Avoca Township still exists north of Fairbury. The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a Sunday School cloth banner from the Avoca village church that Bill & Cathryn Frisby donated.



Map illustrating 2023 roads overlayed on roads in 1876 and the location of the Village of Avoca.



Street map of village of Avoca from 1893 Atlas of Livingston County.

CHAPTER 27

Popejoy Family Pioneer Settlers of Livingston County

The story of the Popejoy family began with the birth of William Champion Popejoy Sr. in Darke County, Ohio, in 1793. His parents were John Terrance Popejoy (1753-1825) and Mary Ann Champe (1763-1821).

The Kickapoo tribe moved from Leroy to three miles south of Fairbury in 1828. There were 630 members of the tribe living south of Fairbury. In 1830, the Kickapoo moved ten miles east to a location three miles south of Chatsworth. The Kickapoo village included a permanent council house and ninety-seven wigwams.

Just as the Kickapoo left Fairbury for Chatsworth, the Valentine Darnall family settled south of Fairbury in 1830. Back in Ohio, William C. Popejoy married Rebecca Hannaman. He was 37, and she was 25 years of age when they married. They had four children.

In 1831, the William Popejoy family moved from Ohio to Avoca Township, about four miles north of Fairbury. In 1832, the McDowell family settled on the South Branch of the Vermilion River, about five miles north of Fairbury. They established the Avoca village slightly south and west of the Avoca Cemetery's current location.

In 1832, the Blackhawk War broke out. The early settlers around Fairbury became concerned the Kickapoo tribe might join the war. The Kickapoo Chief told pioneer Chatsworth settler Franklin Oliver that he could stay on his farm, but the other settlers should temporarily return to Indiana until the war ended. The early settlers, including the McDowells and Popejoys, went to Indiana until the war ended. At the conclusion of the five-month-long Black Hawk War, the Kickapoo were forced to leave the state of Illinois.

Livingston County was formed in 1837, with Pontiac designated as the county seat. In 1840, William Popejoy purchased four tracts of land from

the federal government. William purchased 280 acres in Section 11 of Avoca Township and paid the federal government $1.25 per acre. William's farm was about one mile north of the village of Avoca.

Also, in 1840, Mr. Popejoy asked Mr. Wilson, another pioneer settler, if he could rent his horse for a trip to Bloomington and back. Mr. Popejoy agreed to care for, feed and shod the horse, plus pay Mr. Wilson $1. Mr. Popejoy made the trip to Bloomington and returned the horse to Mr. Wilson. Unfortunately, the horse died soon after it was returned home. Mr. Wilson sued Mr. Popejoy and alleged that Mr. Popejoy had not taken proper care of his horse and requested $300 in damages. Mr. Popejoy retained 31-year-old Abraham Lincoln as his attorney. Isaac Wilson retained Stephen A. Douglas as his attorney.

Since Livingston County was founded in 1837, no permanent courthouse had been built by 1840. The court hearings were held in a cabin owned by Henry Weed. The jury held its deliberations on a pile of sawn logs on the banks of the Vermilion River in Pontiac.

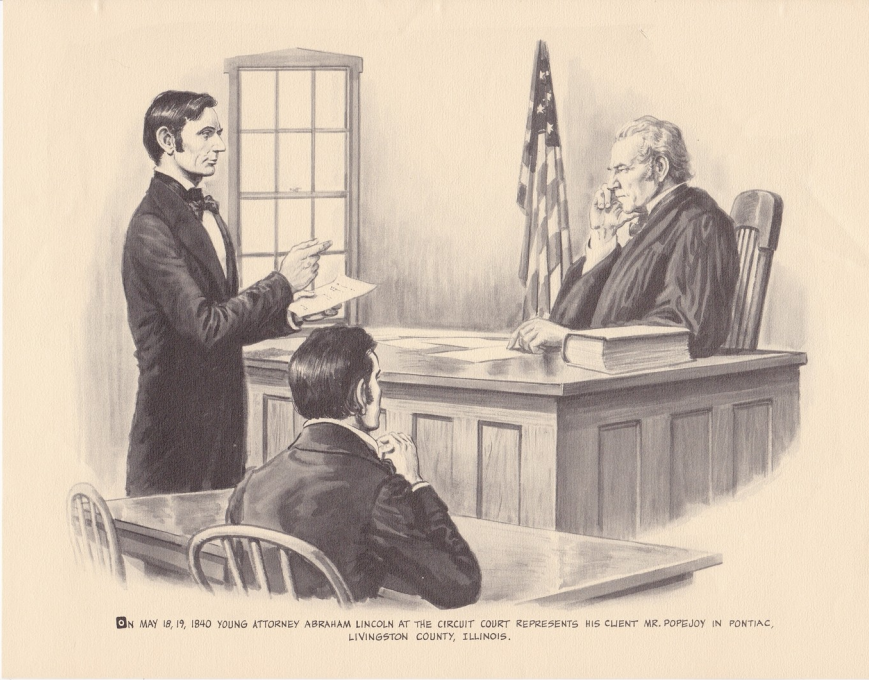
The trial of Wilson versus Popejoy was held in May of 1840. This trial was the first legal case ever decided in Livingston County. Mr. Lincoln lost the case, and the jury found in favor of Mr. Wilson. However, Mr. Lincoln was able to get the $300 sought by Mr. Wilson reduced to $70.25.

A few months later, Isaac Wilson alleged that William Popejoy had stolen meat from Mrs. William McDowell in the village of Avoca. Mr. Popejoy said he had not stolen the meat and sued Mr. Wilson for slander. Mr. Popejoy continued to use Abraham Lincoln as his attorney for this legal matter. Mr. Wilson fired Stephen A. Douglas, one of the most famous lawyers in Illinois, because of his poor performance on the first lawsuit. Mr. Wilson hired Burton C. Cook as his attorney in the second lawsuit.

The court hearing for the slander suit of Popejoy versus Wilson was conducted in Pontiac in October of 1840. Mr. Lincoln won this case, and the jury awarded $2,000 to Mr. Popejoy. This amount was considered a significant judgment in that era. This amount of money would be equivalent to $52,620 in today's dollars.

William Popejoy spent several years farming in Livingston County before moving to Cropsey in McLean County. In October 1845, William Popejoy signed a contract to build a new house. The contractor, James S. Coberly, built a frame house twenty-eight feet long, eighteen feet wide, and nine feet high. There was a porch on each side of the house and one room eight feet square at each end of one porch. William was to furnish the timber from his farm and all other materials. The contract related to the construction cost was one hundred thirty dollars, which was paid in cows, pork, one horse, and a two-horse wagon. The cows were given to Mr. Coberly when the work started, a horse and three hundred pounds of pork on March 1, 1846, and the balance on December 1, 1846. William Popejoy died in 1848 at the age of 55.

Subsequent generations of descendants of William Popejoy continued to live in the Cropsey area. William Popejoy is the third great-grandfather of Ray Popejoy, founder of Popejoy Plumbing, Heating, Electric, and Geothermal company in Fairbury.


ON MAY 18, 19, 1840 YOUNG ATTORNEY ABRAHAM LINCOLN AT THE CIRCUIT COURT REPRESENTS HIS CLIENT MR. POPEJOY IN PONTIAC, LIVINGSTON COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

On May 18, 19, 1840, young Attorney Abraham Lincoln at the Circuit Court represents his client Mr. Popejoy in Pontiac, Livingston County, Illinois

CHAPTER 28

Four Soldiers Who Survived Dreaded Andersonville Prison

During the Civil War, the Confederacy set up a prisoner-of-war camp in Andersonville, Georgia. This camp developed a reputation as the worst prisoner-of-war camp on either the Confederacy or Union sides. Of the approximately 45,000 Union prisoners held at Andersonville during the war, nearly 13,000 died, giving a 29% death rate.

Two significant factors combined to make Andersonville the deadliest Civil War prisoner camp. The first factor was the discontinuation of prisoner exchanges. When the Civil War started, both sides would periodically exchange prisoners. These exchanges decreased the need for large prisoner camps.

In September of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves. The Emancipation Proclamation allowed for the enrollment of formerly enslaved people into the United States military. Nearly 200,000 blacks, most ex-slaves, joined the Union Army during the war. Their contributions gave the North additional manpower, which was a significant factor in winning the war.

After African Americans joined the Union Army, the Confederacy refused to include black troops in military prisoner exchanges. President Lincoln ordered the stoppage of all prisoner exchanges with the Confederacy. The number of prisoners dramatically swelled after the prisoner swaps stopped.

The second major factor that made Andersonville the deadliest prisoner camp was the prisoners' lack of food. During the latter half of the Civil War, the South did not have enough food for their fighting soldiers. Not enough food was left to feed the Union prisoners held at Andersonville. The camp commander, Captain Henry Wirz, often asked for food and medicine for the prisoners. All of his requests were denied.

The number of prisoners at Andersonville swelled to four times the design capacity of the prison. A small creek ran through the Georgia camp. This little creek was used as a latrine by the prisoners. The stream was also their only drinking water supply. The water became contaminated, and thousands of men died of starvation and disease.

A group of Union Army prisoners, calling themselves the Andersonville Raiders, attacked their fellow inmates to steal food, jewelry, money, and clothing. They were primarily armed with clubs and killed to get what they wanted. Another group organized by Peter "Big Pete" Aubrey to stop the theft, calling themselves "Regulators." They caught nearly all of the Raiders, who were tried by the Regulators' judge, Peter McCullough, and a jury selected from a group of new prisoners. This jury sentenced six of the Raiders to death by hanging. Camp commander Henry Wirz allowed the executions to take place.

On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse. John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln six days later, on April 15, 1865. The Andersonville Prison was liberated by Union forces in early May of 1865, with the war officially ending on May 13, 1865.

Captain Henry Wirz was arrested and charged with war crimes for his inhuman treatment of the Andersonville prisoners. He was held for a military trial in Washington, DC. Washington's public sentiment was unfavorable towards Captain Wirz because of Lincoln's assassination. Many former prisoners testified against Captain Wirz at his trial. He was found guilty and hung on November 10, 1865.

Pulaski Mussey was a farmer in Fairbury before the Civil War. He joined the Illinois 16th Cavalry Company M as a Private and survived internment in the Andersonville camp.

James M. Wright lived in Bloomington before the Civil War. Wright served in the Illinois 1st Cavalry and then re-enlisted in the 16th Cavalry unit as a bugler. He was captured and served time at several Confederate war camps, including Andersonville. After the war ended, he traveled to Washington, DC, and testified against Andersonville camp commander

Henry Wirz. After the war, he returned to Fairbury and served as a Livingston County Deputy Sheriff.

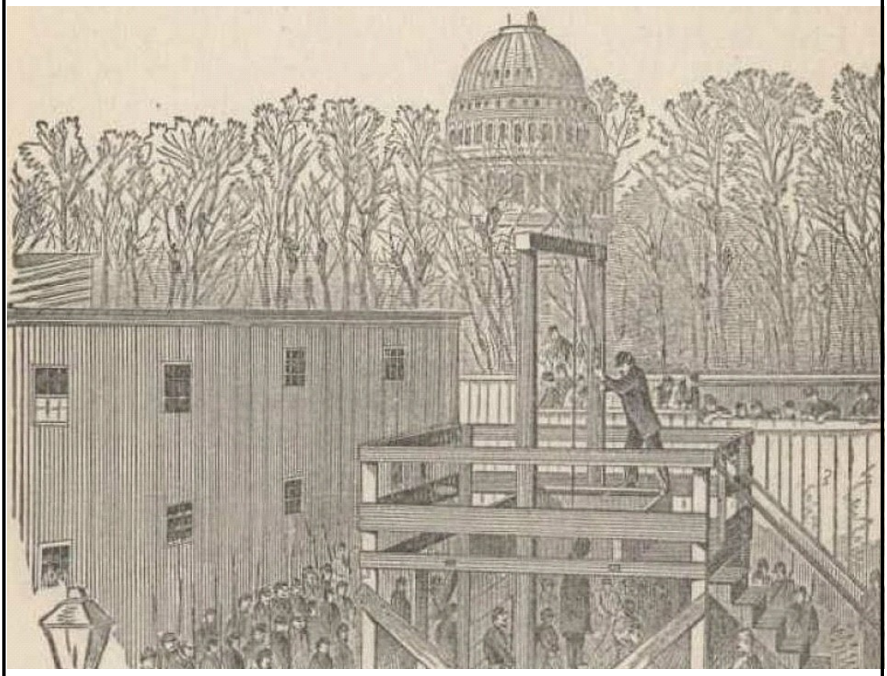
William Hughes Cornwell, the oldest son of Solomon S. and Emily Cornwell, was born in 1844 near Princeville, Illinois. At the age of 17, he enlisted in Company D of the Eleventh Illinois Cavalry. He was engaged in the battles of Shiloh, Luka, and Corinth. At Corinth, he was taken prisoner but was soon paroled and came to St. Louis and was exchanged in February.

Cornwell rejoined his unit at Jackson, Tennessee. He fought at the battle of Vicksburg and was granted a thirty-day leave to visit his family and friends. Cornwell had been away from home for two and a half years. W. H. Cornwell returned to military service, and in December of 1864, he was wounded in the hip by a musket ball. He was taken to the dreaded Andersonville prison and was held there for five months until it was liberated in May of 1865. His relatively early death at age 53 was attributed to his poor conditions at Andersonville.

The granddaughter of W.H. Cornwell was Beulah E. Cornwell (1899-1978). She was a school teacher in Fairbury and married Harold H. Dameron (1897-1964). Harold worked his whole life for the TP&W Railroad in Fairbury. The Maley and Dameron families still living in the Fairbury area are descendants of W. H. Cornwell.

Benjamin Robinson was born in Ohio. He enlisted in the 95th Ohio Infantry as a private. Robinson was wounded in his left arm, captured, and sent to Andersonville. For thirty days, he experienced the horrors of Andersonville. During the winter of 1865, Robinson went barefoot without shoes or stockings. Robinson moved to Fairbury after the war and was in the real estate business. He also served as a Fairbury Postmaster and was the Livingston County Sheriff.

Given the 29% death rate at Andersonville Prison, it was a miracle these four men all survived and went on to live productive lives. Today, Andersonville is a National Historic Site located 125 miles south of Atlanta, Georgia.



EXECUTION OF HENRY WIRZ - LOWERING THE BODY.
(From a sketch in Harper's Weekly made on the spot.)

CHAPTER 29

Early Fairbury Businessman and Land Dealer

One of Fairbury's colorful early citizens was Parker W. Dresser, Jr. The story of the Dresser family began with the birth of Parker W. Dresser Sr. in New York in 1799. Mr. Dresser married Lydia Cronkhite in 1818 in New York. Parker Dresser Sr. and Lydia had eight children.

One of these eight children was Parker Dresser Jr., born in 1825 in Pamelia, New York. By the 1840 U.S. Census, the family had moved to Hillsdale County, Michigan. The youngest child of Parker and Lydia Dresser was Solomon Robert Dresser. He was born in 1842 in Michigan. Solomon Dresser invented several oil field drilling tools and started the S. R. Dresser Manufacturing Company. Solomon also was elected to the U.S. Congress as a Representative in 1903 and 1905.

In the 1850 Census, Parker Dresser Sr. was still living in Michigan. Parker Dresser Jr. was 24 years old and lived in Lafayette, Indiana. It is not clear from the Census what the occupation of the younger Mr. Dresser was.

In 1850, Congress passed the Script Act. This law granted free farmland primarily to veterans of the War of 1812. Many of these veterans sold their land grants on the open market for about 30 cents an acre, well below the official government price of $2.50 per acre. An early settler who wanted to move to Central Illinois could buy land for only 30 cents an acre if he purchased a land grant from a military veteran.

This new law set off a boom in the number of farmers who settled in Central Illinois. Most of the land in Central Illinois was purchased between 1853 and 1859 when the free land grants ended. Many land speculators entered the land investment business in that era.

Although the primary residence of Parker Dresser Jr. was in Lafayette, he became a significant figure in Central Illinois land transactions. The land office for Central Illinois was in Danville. An Iroquois County history book noted that Parker Dresser Jr. was well known for his real estate

business focused at the Danville land office. According to federal land purchase records, Parker Dresser Jr. was involved with over 100 Central Illinois real estate transactions.

In the 1860 Census, Parker Dresser Jr. was 35 years of age and officially lived in Lafayette, Indiana. Mr. Dresser listed his occupation as a farmer and owned $10,000 in real estate and $3,000 in his personal estate. His $13,000 net worth in 1860 would equal $406,000 in today's dollars. Mr. Dresser must have been a very successful farmland real estate businessman.

In 1861, at the age of 36, Parker Dresser Jr. married 21-year-old Columbia P. Noyes in Lafayette. She was the daughter of a preacher and taught school before her marriage. Newspapers recounted that she was an accomplished and refined woman. Parker and Columbia had five children.

In the 1850s, Parker Dresser Jr. purchased land in the Fairbury area. He built a large wooden grain warehouse in what is now Sunken Park on the east end of Locust Street. Unfortunately, in 1868, Fairbury experienced the first of many fires. This first fire destroyed the warehouse of Parker Dresser Jr. He later rebuilt the warehouse and conducted a Fairbury business until he died in 1901.

In the 1870 Census, the Parker Dresser Jr. family had moved from Lafayette to Chicago. Mr. Dresser listed his occupation as a real estate dealer. On the Census, he reported owning real estate worth $50,000 and personal holdings of $10,000. This wealth would be equivalent to $1.33 million in today's dollars. In an 1870 Chicago business directory, he gave the address of his firm as 100 Washington Street in Chicago.

In 1877, Mr. Dresser was 52 years of age, and his wife Columbia was 37 years of age. Mrs. Dresser filed for divorce and claimed that Mr. Dresser was cruel to her and suffered from drunkenness. She noted that he owned over $10,000 worth of land in Illinois and Iowa. She asked that part of the profits from these landholdings be used to pay her alimony. Mrs. Dresser also asked for custody of their five children.

In early 1888, a nasty four-day-long divorce case was conducted in a Chicago court. Court testimony revealed that Mr. Dresser had been

unfaithful to his wife early in their marriage. For the children's good, Mrs. Dresser continued living with her husband. She then sought advice from her old friend Professor McChesney using a written letter. Her first letter turned into a series of letters to the Professor.

Mr. Dresser found a new partially written letter to the Professor. He confronted Mrs. Dresser with a revolver in one hand and choked her with the other hand until she admitted the Professor was the recipient of her letter. Mrs. Dresser agreed to stop the letters to the Professor.

Mr. Dresser forced his wife to recreate her previous letters to the Professor. To embarrass his wife, he read these letters in the presence of her and their children. When Mrs. Dresser tried to grab the letters, Mr. Dresser knocked her unconscious. Judge Moore granted the divorce to Mrs. Dresser.

After the divorce, Mrs. Dresser and her children lived in Chicago. She died at the age of 50 in 1890. She was buried with her parents in Lafayette.

Mr. Dresser lived in Fairbury after the divorce. In 1888, Mr. Dresser got into an altercation in Fairbury with a man over a $10 debt and beat the man. Constable Hanna could not arrest him because he barricaded himself in his building. Mr. Dresser finally surrendered the next day and was fined $10.

Parker Dresser Jr. died in 1901 at the age of 75. He was buried in Michigan with his parents. Mr. Dresser was one of Illinois's most active farmland dealers and one of Fairbury's first businessmen.

Columbia P. Noyes (1840-1890), wife of Parker Dresser Jr. (1825-1901). Photo circa 1870.

CHAPTER 30

Confederate Soldier Was Father of Prominent Fairbury Business Leader

After the Civil War ended in 1865, a few Confederate veterans of the Civil War moved to Fairbury. One of these men was William H. Patterson. He operated a cannon at Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg and took part in General Pickett's wedding a few months later.

The story of William Henry Patterson started when he was born in 1838 in Virginia. He was the son of Joseph M. Patterson and Elizabeth Carper. In the 1850 U.S. Census, Joseph Patterson reported owning one enslaved person.

The Civil War started in April 1861 when the Confederacy fired upon Fort Sumter. Twenty-three-year-old W. H. Patterson enlisted as a Confederate soldier and was assigned to Major General George Edward Pickett's command.

During the beginning of the Civil War, General Pickett was a widower. In early 1863, he began to court 20-year-old LaSalle "Sallie" Corbell (1843-1931). The General would slip away from the Confederate Army and visit Sallie at her home in Virginia. LaSalle "Sallie" Corbell was born in Chuckatuck, Virginia, on May 16, 1843, the daughter of David John Corbell and Elizabeth Phillips, slaveholders and plantation owners near Suffolk. Sallie attended the Lynchburg Female Seminary in Lynchburg, Virginia.

The pivotal battle of the Civil War was Gettysburg in early July of 1863. Major General Pickett's soldiers were the last to arrive at Gettysburg. Pickett was assigned to lead a charge against the Union forces. Pickett's Confederate soldiers were slaughtered, and the skirmish became known as Pickett's Charge. Private William H. Patterson fought in the battle and was in charge of an artillery piece. General Grant defeated General Lee at Gettysburg. It was all downhill for the Confederate army after the Battle of Gettysburg.

In November of 1863, General Pickett married Sallie Corbell. When she married General Pickett, she became known as the "child bride of the Confederacy" and was famed as one of the most beautiful girls in Virginia. Private William H. Patterson was a member of the squad of Confederate soldiers who fired a salute at the wedding.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, W.H. Patterson married Mary Ann Kessler in 1866. He was 27 years old, and she was 21. William and Mary Patterson had eight children in Virginia. They had a small tobacco farm in Bedford County, Virginia. The eight children helped in the tobacco fields, including pulling "suckers" off the tobacco plants. When Mr. Patterson took a load of tobacco to market, he often brought home "store" cookies, a rare treat for his children.

In March 1882, Mr. Patterson moved his family from Virginia to Fairbury. Mr. Patterson was 44 years old and worked as a laborer. William H. Patterson had $5 cash when he and his family arrived by train in Fairbury. Mrs. Patterson quickly became active in the Fairbury Baptist Church. The eight children found various jobs in Fairbury.

In the late 1800s, the Chautauqua Movement spread from New York to the Midwestern states. This movement started as a program to educate Sunday school teachers. The Chautauqua Movement morphed into an adult education program. The Chautauqua meetings would often last for one week. Every summer, the Chautauqua was held at Chautauqua Park in Pontiac. Hundreds of Fairbury people attended the Pontiac event.

Major General Pickett died in 1875 at the age of 50. He was buried in the Confederate section of Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia. His widow, Sallie, spent the rest of her life as an author and speaker about her husband and the Battle of Gettysburg.

In the 1880s, Sallie became a famous writer and speaker. Her first book, Pickett and His Men, was published in 1899. Between 1899 and 1931, she toured America and wrote for Cosmopolitan, McClure's, and other popular magazines. Sallie published a dozen books about her husband and the Civil War.

In 1906, Sallie Pickett lectured at the Pontiac Chautauqua. William H. Patterson traveled from Fairbury to the Chautauqua to hear her speak. After Sallie's lecture, William spent one hour with her, reminiscing about the Battle of Gettysburg.

Sallie died in 1931 at the age of 88. She was buried in Arlington National Cemetery because no women were allowed to be buried in the Confederate section of the Richmond cemetery. In 1998, Sallie's descendants threatened to move General Pickett's remains from Richmond to Arlington unless his wife could be buried with him. Cemetery officials relented, and Sallie was buried next to her husband.

In 1910, Mr. Patterson was a City of Fairbury employee and was the Graceland Cemetery caretaker. In 1913, at the age of 75, Mr. Patterson traveled from Fairbury to Gettysburg to celebrate the battle's 50th anniversary.

Mrs. Patterson died in 1916 at the age of 71. She was buried in Graceland Cemetery. William H. Patterson died in 1927 at the age of 88. He was buried with his wife at Graceland.

Of the eight children of William and Mary Patterson, the most well-known in Fairbury was James A. Patterson. As a young man, he grew up in Fairbury and tried his hand at many different jobs. These jobs included driving a delivery wagon for Bethard's Basement Grocery, shaving necks in Jay Tyler's barbershop, picking chickens, and husking corn.

In 1903, J. A. Patterson took a job as a "Printer's Devil" at the Blade for $1 per week. That job included cleaning, sweeping, and being a printer's apprentice. James Patterson worked his way up to Editor and Publisher of the Blade. Mr. Patterson was the Blade editor for more than 50 years. Mr. Patterson was also the Chairman of the Board of the Fairbury Savings and Loan Association. James A. Patterson died in 1973 at the age of 91.

William H. Patterson had an exciting life. He fought at Gettysburg, the pivotal battle of the Civil War. W. H. Patterson fired a salute at General Pickett's wedding and met one of the Confederacy's most well-known ladies, Sallie Corbell. William Patterson also lived to see his son James A. Patterson become one of the business leaders of Fairbury.

General Pickett and LaSalle Corbell Pickett, 1863.

CHAPTER 31

Early Fairbury Builder Brownson

Gibson Brownson was a carpenter and one of the first citizens of Fairbury. He built many houses in Fairbury and the Catholic and Presbyterian Churches. The Brownson family's story began with Isaac Brownson's birth in 1758 in New Milford, Connecticut. Isaac was the son of Thomas Brownson (1725-1802) and Betsy Baldwin (1728-1799).

In 1775, the first battles in the American Revolutionary War took place. In January 1776, Isaac Brownson enlisted for one year of military service. He was a Private in Captain Isaac Bostwick's Company in the regiment of Colonel Charles Webb for the state of Connecticut. In October 1776, Washington's army reached their supply base at White Plains, New York. British General William Howe attacked Washington's army and forced it to retreat from New York to New Jersey. Private Isaac Brownson participated in this battle.

General George Washington decided to execute a daring surprise attack on the British forces by moving his army by boats across the Delaware River at Trenton on Christmas Day in 1776. Washington's raid caught the British troops off guard and defeated them. Private Isaac Brownson rode in one of the boats that ferried the Revolutionary Army across the Delaware on Christmas night. This battle was one of the critical battles in the Revolutionary War.

After the Revolutionary War, 24-year-old Isaac Brownson married 18-year-old Joanna Beardsley in 1782. Isaac and Joanna Brownson had nine children, including Elisha Brownson, born in 1791 in New Milford, Connecticut.

In 1799, Isaac Brownson and his family moved to Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. Elisha Brownson decided to enlist in the military when the War of 1812 broke out. Unfortunately, Elisha's poor health prevented him from serving in that war. In 1823, thirty-two-year-old Elisha Brownson married 36-year-old Mary Titus. After their wedding, they moved to

Bradford County, Pennsylvania. Elisha cleared some heavy timberland and established a nice farm. Revolutionary War veteran Isaac Brownson retired and went to live with Elisha on his farm.

In 1832, Elisha and Mary Brownson had a son named Gibson Bannister Brownson. When Gibson was born, Elisha was 41 and Mary was 44. About 1851, Gibson Brownson started serving a three-year apprenticeship as a carpenter in New York. Gibson received $150 for his three years of work and had to pay for his clothing. This income would be equivalent to $5,057 in today's dollars.

After finishing his apprenticeship, Gibson went west on a prospecting trip to see more of America. In 1854, Gibson passed through Livingston County. Fairbury had yet to be formed, and Pontiac was a small hamlet. Gibson was always able to find work as a carpenter wherever he traveled.

The Elisha Brownson family moved to Livingston County in 1856. Gibson Brownson moved to Avoca to help build new houses in the thriving village. Just one year later, the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to Indiana, and Fairbury was created. The town of Avoca quickly ceased to exist, and several houses were moved into Fairbury. In 1857, Gibson Brownson helped build some of the first houses in Fairbury.

On April 12, 1861, the Confederates fired upon Fort Sumter, and the Civil War began. Fairbury area men primarily joined one of two military units. The first unit was the 3rd Illinois Cavalry Company K. The second was the 129th Illinois Infantry Company E. Gibson joined the cavalry unit. When he enlisted, Gibson was 29 years old and six feet one inch tall. Gibson had blue eyes and a light complexion. Gibson fought with Company K until he became sick and had to be sent to a hospital. After recovering, Gibson joined the Mississippi Marine Brigade. The Mississippi Marine Brigade was a Union Army amphibious unit that included the United States Ram Fleet and operated from November 1862 to August 1864. The brigade was established to act swiftly against Confederate forces operating near the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Gibson mustered out of the military in August of 1864.

After the war, Gibson briefly worked as a carpenter in St. Louis. He then returned to Fairbury and established a contracting business with his

brother. Their company employed 15 men, and they built many houses and churches. This firm built the Catholic and Presbyterian churches in Fairbury. The Brownson family were members of the Presbyterian Church.

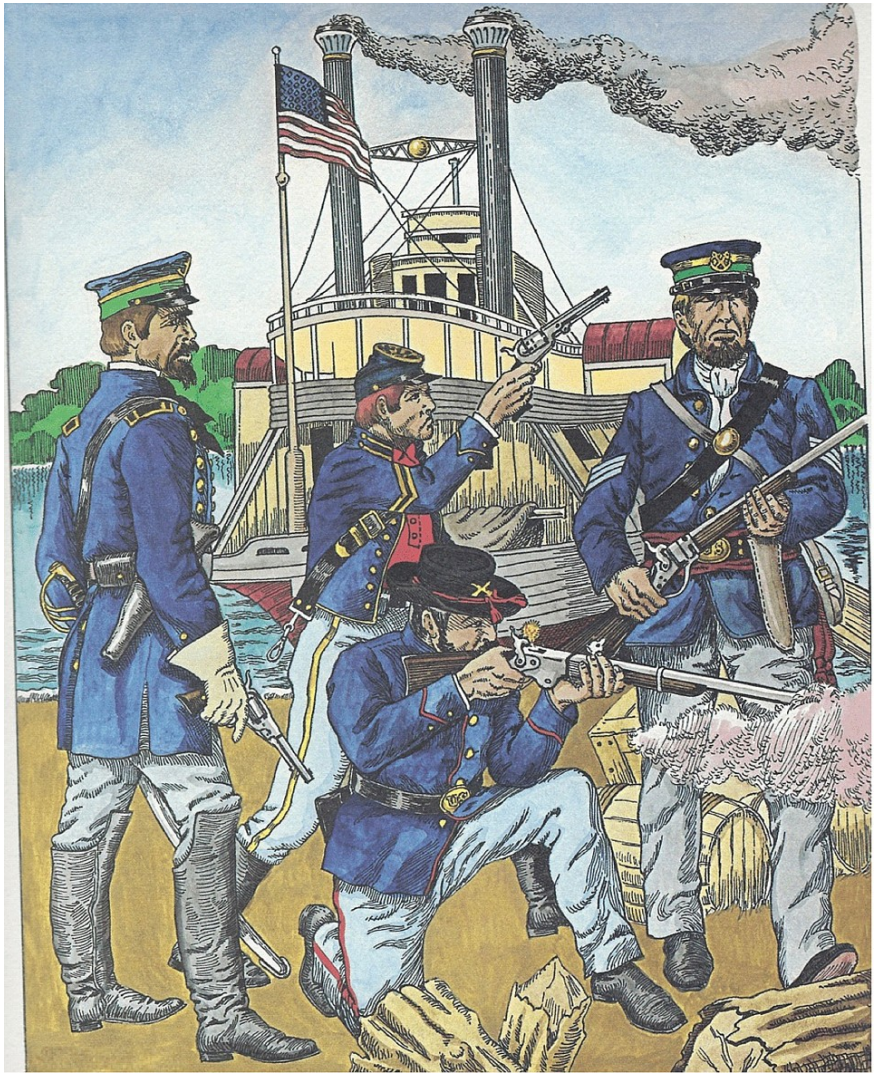
In 1868, Gibson married Susan M. Ormsby. When they married, Gibson was 35, and Susan was 29. They had two daughters. Gibson Brownson built a new home for his family after he married.

Both daughters of Gibson and Susan received excellent educations. Allie attended school in Dixon and taught school in Fairbury until she married John D. Watkins of Cleveland, Ohio. Nellie graduated from Wesleyan and taught school in Fairbury until she married George Nimmo.

The 1892 Blade noted that Fairbury was booming, and many new houses and businesses were being built. The Blade listed the Fairbury building contractors, which included Brownson & Waggoner, Shook & Keyes, Halleck & Skean, Delph Richer, W. J. McComes, and John Sheiler.

Gibson Brownson died in 1908 in Fairbury at the age of 75. He was buried in Graceland Cemetery. Gibson was a member of the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic), a Civil War veterans organization. Gibson helped form the Fairbury Building & Loan Association and served as President for many years. Gibson served on the school board, was a Township Supervisor, and was an Alderman on the Fairbury City Council.

Susan Brownson died in 1925 at the age of 87. She was buried with her husband at Graceland Cemetery. The Brownson family served in both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. Gibson Brownson was a community leader and built many houses and churches in Fairbury.



Typical uniforms of the Mississippi Marine Brigade. Gibson Brownson fought with this unit during the Civil War.

CHAPTER 32

E. F. Law Was Early Fairbury Doctor and Farmer

Dr. E. F. Law and his son, Dr. Otis Law, were early Fairbury medical doctors, and they owned farmland in Avoca Township north of Fairbury. The story of the Law family began with the birth of George Law in 1822 in Northamptonshire, England, about 75 miles northwest of London. In 1853, thirty-one-year-old George Law married 26-year-old Alice Jellis in England. George and Alice Law had ten children.

Shortly after they were married, the George Law family emigrated from England to Avoca Township, close to the village of McDowell. In the 1860 U.S. Census, the George Law family lived in the Pontiac area, and he was a farmer.

In 1873, Edward Frederick Law, the youngest child of George and Alice Law, was born near McDowell. In the 1880 Census, the George Law family lived in Eppards Point Township, near McDowell. Seven children were still living at home.

Alice Law, 56, died in 1884. She was buried in the Houder Cemetery, which is on Billet Road, about two miles north of McDowell. Edward F. Law attended a country school near McDowell and then Pontiac High School. He graduated from the Grand Prairie Seminary in Onarga and taught school for several years.

E. F. Law graduated from Rush Medical College in 1903. Edward was 30 years old when he finished medical school and started his first practice in Weston, Illinois. In 1905, George Law died at the age of 82. George was buried with his wife in the Houder Cemetery.

In 1909, Dr. E. F. Law married Louisa Mary "Lucy" Householder. Edward was 35, and Lucy was 29 when they married. Edward and Lucy Law had two children. Their son Otis H. Law was born in 1910, and their daughter Anna Mae Law was born in 1914.

Dr. E. F. Law began experiencing health issues in 1917. He retired from his medical practice at age 44 and moved to his farm northwest of Fairbury.

In 1924, Dr. E. F. Law resumed his medical practice at age 51 in Fairbury. Dr. Law was known for his whimsical sense of humor, a humor that never bore a sting. A few moments of conversation with him was a pleasant experience, which many people enjoyed throughout the day. Dr. Law was very active in the Fairbury community. He was a member of the Methodist Church and served on the board of directors. Dr. Law also served on the Fairbury Township High School board of education. Dr. Law was the first president of the Fairbury Rotary Club and was a member of the Phi Chi Psi and Shore Acre social groups.

Otis Law graduated from Wesleyan University in 1932 and then attended and graduated from Vanderbilt Medical School. When he interned at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, Dr. Otis Law met his future wife, Anna "Sue" Field. In 1936, Dr. Otis Law began his practice as a family physician in Pontiac.

The death of Dr. E. F. Law in 1937 was a shock to the Fairbury community. Dr. E. F. Law died at the age of 63 from a heart attack. On the way to his medical office in the Blade building at the southwest corner of Locust and Third Streets, Dr. E. F. Law became very ill. He made it into his medical office and telephoned Dr. H. C. Sauer. Dr. Sauer and Doctor W. A. Marshall both treated Doctor E. F. Law. They administered a stimulant to Dr. Law. He initially became better but then died later that day. The community was shocked at the death of Dr. Law because he was so well known in Fairbury. Dr. Law was buried in Graceland Cemetery. Dr. Law owned 240 acres of farmland in Avoca Township in Section 17. John Law, brother to Dr. Law, also owned 152 acres nearby in Section 20.

Shortly before he died, Dr. E. F. Law paid a professional photographer to take his picture. A copy of this photo was used in the Blade for his obituary in 1937. Recently, this portrait was found when a family was cleaning their attic. The family donated the photograph to the Fairbury Echoes Museum.

In 1939, twenty-eight-year-old Dr. Otis Law married twenty-five-year-old Sue Field. Otis and Sue Law had two children.

In 1941, John Law and his neighbors threshed the wheat grown on John's farmland and Dr. E. F. Law's farmland nearby. A professional photographer went to the farm and took two photographs of the men and the threshing scene. Two copies of these 80-year-old photographs still survive today. The farmers depicted in these photos include John Law, Clarence Francis Maley, Roy Friant, Shelton Tucker, Raymond Tavener, Frank Masterson, Bud Wink, Munroe Garland, Wayne Ziller Sr., Wayne Ziller Jr., Clarence Friant, Walter Askew, Eldon Askew, Ed Snider, and Frank Webster.

1941 also marked the start of World War II. Dr. Otis Law served in the U.S. Army Air Corps's Flying Tigers in China. Dr. Otis Law practiced medicine in Pontiac from 1936 until 1974. After his medical career, Dr. Otis Law retired to Florida. He passed away in 1998 at the age of 88. His wife, Lucy Law, lived to be 100 years old and died in 2014. Both Dr. Otis Law and his wife were buried at Graceland Cemetery.

For over seven decades, Dr. E. F. Law and his son, Dr. Otis Law, provided medical care to the Fairbury and Pontiac area. The Law family also owned farmland northwest of Fairbury. Over the years, several different men tenant farmed this land for the Law family.

Dr. Edward Frederick Law (1873-1937) of Fairbury, Illinois.
Photo circa 1936.

CHAPTER 33

History of Fairbury's Hospitals

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. The population of Fairbury in 1860 was 262 residents. By the year 1900, Fairbury's population had grown from only 262 to 2,187 citizens. During this era, Fairbury often had about six medical doctors serving the community. There were no hospitals nearby, and the doctors all made house calls. Patients were typically treated in their homes. The first hospital in the Fairbury area was the St. James Hospital in Pontiac, Illinois. It was first established in 1907.

In 1909, two young women attended nursing school at the Hinsdale, Illinois, Sanitarium Training School. One of these young women was Rachel Olson. She was born in 1879 in Chicago. The other young woman was Anna Martha Gadeken. She was born in Germany in 1886. She married William Vetter in Nebraska at age seventeen in 1903. Rachel and Martha graduated from the Hinsdale nursing school in May of 1909.

In 1911, these two young women established the first hospital in Fairbury. Rachel Olson was thirty-two years old, and Mrs. Vetter was twenty-five years old. They created this first hospital in the second story of the Archer House on Locust Street. The Archer House is several buildings to the west of the Walton Centre. The Archer House name on the front of the building was repainted in May of 2018.

After a short while, they moved the hospital to a house located at the northwest corner of First and Oak Streets. They then moved the hospital again to 313 West Oak Street. On this site was the John Monroe cement block house at the southeast corner of Oak and Webster Streets.

In August of 1912, the editor of the Lake Union Herald medical magazine paid a visit to the Fairbury hospital. The editor reported that Miss Rebecca Olson assisted Mrs. Martha Vetter in a house sufficiently large enough to accommodate four or five patients. They had one room fitted up for operating, and one of the resident physicians brought his surgical patients

to their little institution. The editor said the hospital offered electric light baths, massage, galvanic and sinusoidal electricity, and high-frequency treatments. The editor said the new hospital was having excellent success.

In 1913, "Martha" Gadeken married Charlotte farmer William Henry Hoppe Jr. in Fairbury. They had four children. In 1930, they moved to Nebraska. In 1933, at the age of forty-six, Martha experienced gallstone problems, and she died in Nebraska. Rachel Olson continued to work at the various Fairbury hospital locations. She died in Fairbury in 1970.

The hospital in the house located at 313 West Oak Street became a community project. Without any persuasion, local citizens banded together and gave freely of their time and talents to remodel the residence. At that time, the public felt that the hospital was their responsibility. They thought it was there to serve their needs and that they must help to make it a good hospital. Local carpenters donated labor and tools and began remodeling the inside. Local decorators painted walls, refinished woodwork, and polished floors. On February 2, 1914, the new hospital was formally opened to the public. The hospital at this location served the Fairbury area for fourteen years until 1928.

In 1928, local community leaders decided that Fairbury needed a larger hospital. On January 29, 1928, the Hospital Board bought a large house on South Fifth Street from the estate of Frieda Munz Scharlach for $6,155. This home was one of the oldest in Fairbury and was built by J. J. Taylor in 1868.

Again, local volunteers helped to remodel this large, rambling house into a hospital. The American Legion was very generous in contributing to the new hospital. The volunteers converted the residence into a ten-bed hospital with a large kitchen, a nursery, a dumb waiter, an elevator, and a reception office. They made an addition to the house, which gave the hospital an operating room. On August 17, 1929, the public was invited to view the new hospital. Fairbury residents were pleased with the accomplishments.

On October 1, 1941, the ground was broken for a new obstetrical unit. A year and a half later, on February 13, 1943, the modern brick obstetrical unit was opened for public inspection. The maternity wing could handle

eleven mothers at one time. This wing had twelve bassinets and one incubator for premature babies. A walkway was constructed to connect the house to the new brick obstetrical unit.

Around 1947, a young boy named Carl Borngasser (1937-2023) had his appendix removed at the old house on South Fifth Street. One of Carl's nurses was Rachel Olson.

The second phase of expanding the hospital was the second wing addition. The ground was broken for the second wing on August 9, 1950. The last stage of the hospital expansion plan was completed by May of 1952. A grand opening ceremony for the completed hospital was held on November 21, 1953. Shortly after the grand opening, the kitchen area was expanded to handle the increased number of patients.

The total cost of the three phases of hospital construction in 1953 was $336,000. This expenditure would be equivalent to $3.2 million in today's dollars. The new hospital had a capacity of ninety-two beds.

In 1964, the Helen Lewis Smith pavilion was added to the north end of the hospital. Its twenty-three-patient capacity brought the total size of the hospital up to 115 beds. The maximum employment level for the hospital and the pavilion was about 135 people.

By 1990, there were not enough new babies being born at the Fairbury Hospital to justify keeping the obstetrics unit open. It closed in March of 1990.

Many factors caused the number of patients at the Fairbury Hospital to decline in the early 1990s. The number of days of hospitalization required for various procedures was dramatically reduced. Specialty outpatient services were available in Pontiac, Bloomington, Champaign, and Peoria. Patients who required medical services sought out larger hospitals. These larger hospitals had better facilities and more experience handling different types of procedures.

The Hospital Board tried to cope with the massive decline in the number of patients at the Fairbury Hospital. Proposals were sought and received from at least three different medical organizations. None of these

proposals solved the problem of needing more patients. In 1994, in-patient services were stopped. In January of 1995, no more emergency room patients were admitted. Sadly, after eighty-four years of having a hospital within the city, Fairbury had to rely on hospital services from Pontiac, Bloomington, Peoria, and Champaign.

The Fairbury Hospital is now being torn down in the Fall of 2023. Many people have driven by the construction site to witness the final days of the Fairbury Hospital.

February 1946 photo looking northeast at the old house on South Fifth Street that served as the Fairbury Hospital. Note walkway connecting house to new brick obstetrics building.

November 1953 photo of Nurse Frances Ann Maley operating the new X-ray machine at the Fairbury Hospital. Nurse Maley was also the Livingston County Nurse and was the grandmother of Dale C. Maley.

We Welcome You . . .

Open House

November 21 and 22, 1953

1 P. M.—5 P. M. and 7 P. M.—9 P. M.

The Fairbury Hospital

A COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

FAIRBURY, ILLINOIS

CHAPTER 34

Troehler Family History Interwoven with Fairbury History

The Troehler family history in the Fairbury area goes back almost to the founding of Fairbury in 1857. The first members of the Troehler family moved to the Fairbury area in 1870. Descendants of the Troehler family became pioneer farmers, businessmen, World War II veterans, and served in the Fairbury Police Department.

The story of the Troehler family began in France. George Troehler was born in 1806 in Alsace, France. George married Magdalena Kleiber in France around 1830. George and Magdalena had three sons in France. Their sons were named Frederick, George Jr., and Philip Edward Troehler. In 1844, the George Troehler family emigrated from France to a farm near Chillicothe, Ohio. In 1847, George and Magdalena had their fourth child, Magdalena Troehler.

Frederick, the oldest son of George and Magdalena Troehler, married Elizabeth Whitler in 1855. They had one child in Chillicothe, Ohio. Frederick died in 1876 at the age of 44. The second oldest son of George and Magdalena, George Jr., enlisted in May of 1864 in Company F of the Ohio 149th Infantry to fight in the Civil War. In August of 1864, George Jr. died of disease and was buried at Antietam National Cemetery.

The youngest son of George and Magdalena Troehler, Philip Edward Troehler, also served in the Civil War. At age 20, Philip Troehler enlisted in Company E of the Ohio 37th Infantry in 1861. His unit fought in the Civil War at the Siege of Vicksburg, the Battle for Atlanta, and General Sherman's March to the Sea. In August of 1864, Philip received word that his younger brother George Jr. had died of disease at Sandy Hook, Virginia. One month later, Philip was mustered out of the Union Army. After the war, Philip Edward Troehler married Rosena Maria Denniwitz in Ohio. Philip and Rosena Troehler had four children in Ohio.

Magdalena Troehler was the youngest child of George and Magdalena Troehler. In 1865, she married Charles C. Dennewitz in Ohio. Mr. Dennewitz was born in Germany. He was the brother of Rosena Maria Denniwitz, the wife of Philip Edward Troehler.

Charles and Magdalena Troehler were the first members of the Troehler family to move to the Fairbury area. In 1870, they moved from Ohio to Avoca Township, near Fairbury, where they raised their family on a farm.

Six years after Charles and Magdalena Troehler moved to the Fairbury area, his parents, George and Magdalena Troehler, moved from Ohio to an 86-acre farm just east and south of Weston, Illinois.

Philip and Rosena Troehler also moved their family of four children from Ohio to Fairbury. They eventually had ten more children, for a total of 14. Many of these children married people from the Fairbury area and made their homes there.

Philip and Rosena Troehler eventually retired from farming and moved into a home at 104 West Cherry Street. Until his pneumonia death in 1923, Philip was one of Fairbury's most respected citizens. He was very active, and every day, he would take a walk through Fairbury to meet his friends for a social hour.

Levi Peter Troehler (1887-1969), one of the sons of Philip and Rosena Troehler, owned the Sanitary Cleaners on Locust Street. This business was the third building east of the northeast corner of Locust and Fourth Streets. The original building no longer stands and has been replaced by a tan sheet metal building.

Early Fairbury had many small, one-person businesses, including barbers, tailors, shoe repairers, lunchrooms, and bathhouses. These small businesses required little floor space and could not justify a large building. Renting space in the basement of a conventional business building was a perfect option for them. Most buildings on the north side of Locust Street were designed with basements that could be rented to small businesses.

Another of the 14 children of Philip and Rosena Troehler was Henry Troehler (1881-1965). He initially worked on his father's farm east of

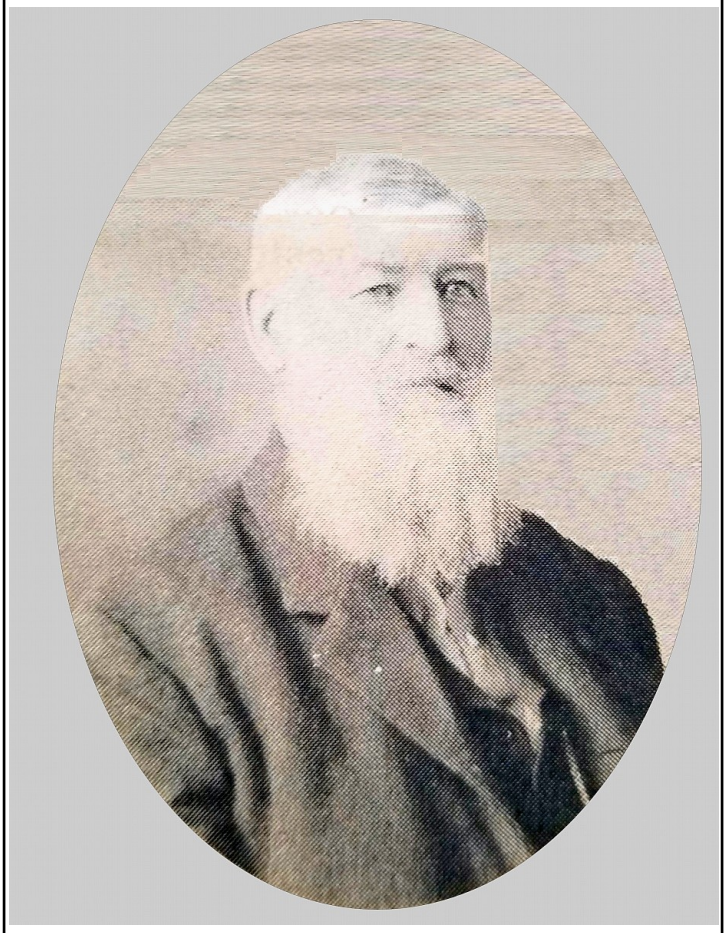
Weston for $20 monthly. At the age of 23, Henry learned the barber trade. He moved to Gridley and was a very popular barber in that village for many years. Henry moved his barbershop from Gridley and eventually to Fairbury. Near the end of his career as a Fairbury barber, Henry ran his basement business in the second building to the east of the northeast corner of Locust and Third Streets. This building is now part of the Bank of Pontiac complex.

Henry Troehler's barbershop was the last of the underground Fairbury businesses. Henry closed his barbershop in 1963. The high sidewalks on Locust Street worked great for horse-drawn buggies. Unfortunately, automobile front bumpers ran into the high sidewalk step. In 1971, the City of Fairbury filled all the basements and poured new sidewalks with two small steps from the street to the main sidewalk level.

Virgil E. Troehler (1920-1982) was the son of Grover Cleveland Troehler. Grover was a house painter and wallpaper hanger in Fairbury. Virgil, the grandson of Philip and Rosena Troehler, grew up in Fairbury and served in the Iceland Base Command in the Signal Corps during World War II. He received the European Theatre Ribbon, American Theatre Ribbon, Victory Medal, Good Conduct Medal, and Meritorious Service Badge. After the war, Virgil became the commander of American Legion Post No. 54 of Fairbury.

One great-grandson of Philip and Rosena Troehler was Phillip Troehler. Phillip was named after his great-grandfather. Phil served as the Fairbury Assistant Chief of Police. Phillip Troehler was also on the Board of Directors for the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Phillip Troehler passed away on May 21, 2022.

The Troehler family has been a part of Fairbury's history for 150 years. Family members include a Civil War veteran, a World War II veteran, a sign painter, an underground business barber, a clothing cleaner, and an Assistant Chief of Police. Their family provided many valuable services to multiple generations of Fairbury citizens.



Philip Edward Troehler (1841-1923)

One of Phil Troehler's badges when he worked for the Fairbury Police Department.

CHAPTER 35

The Reis Family Played an Essential Role in Fairbury History

The Reis family has been essential to Fairbury's history since the late 1800s. The story of the Reis family began with the birth of John B. Reis in Germany in 1859. John B. Reis had a brother named George Reis in Germany. Family lore says that John and his brother George had to flee to America to avoid capture for hunting in Kaiser Wilhelm's woods without permission.

Between 1879 and 1881, brothers John B. Reis and George Reis emigrated from Germany to Fairbury. Family lore says that George Reis died and was buried in an unmarked grave in St. John's Catholic Cemetery north of Fairbury.

In 1886, John B. Reis, 26, and Margaret Haffey, 40, married at Fairbury. Margaret Haffey and both her parents were born in Ireland. James Haffey (1819-1878) and Margaret Erskine (1820-1893) were her parents. John B. Reis ran a tailoring shop in Fairbury for most of his working career. Near the end of his career, he worked in a tailor business in Pontiac with one of his sons.

John B. and Margaret Reis had two boys. One of their sons was John James Reis (1890-1966). He married Eleanor Margaret "Nellie" Taylor (1884-1966). They had five children. John J. Reis worked as a tailor in Pontiac.

Joseph P. Reis, born in 1887, was the other son of John B. and Margaret Reis. Joseph and John J. Reis grew up in Fairbury. Joseph P. Reis married Zoa Genevieve Personett in 1917. Joseph was 29, and Zoa was 19 when they married.

On April 6, 1917, America entered World War I. This conflict lasted until November 11, 1918. On February 21, 1918, Joseph P. Reis was inducted into the U.S. military. His induction paperwork noted that he had been a

musician, tailor, and teacher. His basic training was at Camp MacArthur in Waco, Texas. He became a member of the Aero Squadron. He was promoted to Sergeant 1st Class and was discharged on February 5, 1919.

While Joseph P. Reis served in World War I, his first child, Joseph Patrick Reis, Jr., was born on May 7, 1918. After being discharged from the military in 1919, Joseph P. Reis returned to Fairbury and ran a dry cleaning business.

Joseph P. and Zoa Reis had four children. In addition to Joseph P. Reis Jr., they had George E. Reis, born in 1920, Lillian M. Reis, born in 1921, and John B. Reis, born in 1923.

Two sons of Joseph P. and Zoa Reis entered the military before the start of World War II when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. On April 20, 1937, seventeen-year-old Joseph P. Reis Jr. entered the U.S. Navy. He mainly served in the Pacific Theater and was discharged on July 13, 1947.

Joseph P. Reis Jr. joined the U.S. Navy on June 8, 1937, about six weeks after his brother, George E. Reis, joined the Navy. Joseph served in both the Atlantic and Pacific Theaters in World War II. He was discharged in October 1945 as a chief radio technician.

John B. Reis entered the Naval Reserve in Chicago on January 6, 1942, and was discharged as an apprentice seaman at Great Lakes Naval Hospital on April 27, 1942.

Joseph P. Reis Jr. married Martha M. Best in May 1944. Mr. Reis was a musician and official in the Pensacola Symphony orchestra, as well as the treasurer and manager of the Elks band. He ran a uniform shop and then became a partner in the tailoring firm of Reis and Rein on South Baylen Street. Unfortunately, he died after a short illness in 1950 at the age of 32. Joseph and Martha Reis had no children.

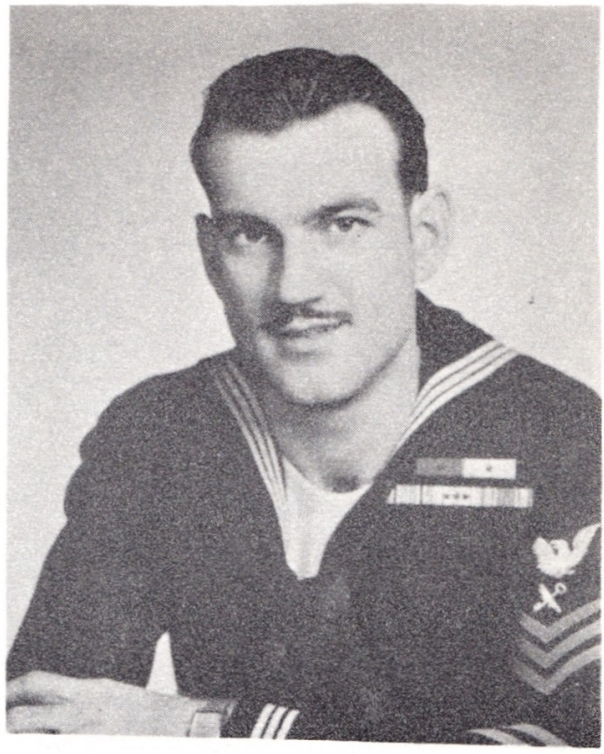
After World War II, George E. Reis earned a degree in physics from MIT. He then moved to Albuquerque in 1951 and worked as a member of the technical staff at the Sandia National Laboratories for 34 years. Reis

married Tess K. Kersting (1926-2020), but he and Tess had no children. George Reis died in 2007 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the age of 86.

Lillian Reis, daughter of Joseph P. and Mary Reis, married John J. O'Brien (1919-1996). John and Lillian Reis had nine children. Lillian O'Brien died in 2013 at the age of 91 in Kankakee.

John B. Reis, son of Joseph P. and Zoa Reis, married Rose Anne Boland in 1953. John B. and Rose Reis had five children. Because he served as the Postmaster of Fairbury for 28 years, John B. Reis was very well-known in the community. Mr. Reis was also notable in the community because he was a magician and liked entertaining others with his music, magic, and comedy shows. John B. Reis died in 2014 at the age of 91 at Fairview Haven.

The Reis family played an essential role in Fairbury's history. One family member served in World War I, and three served in World War II. Family members also owned and operated tailoring and dry cleaning businesses in Fairbury. Another family member served as the Fairbury Postmaster for 28 years.



GEORGE E. REIS

Entered Regular Navy, 1st Enlistment, June 8, 1937 at Chicago, Illinois.

Entered U. S. Naval Reserve, 2nd Enlistment, December 16, 1941 at Chicago, Illinois.

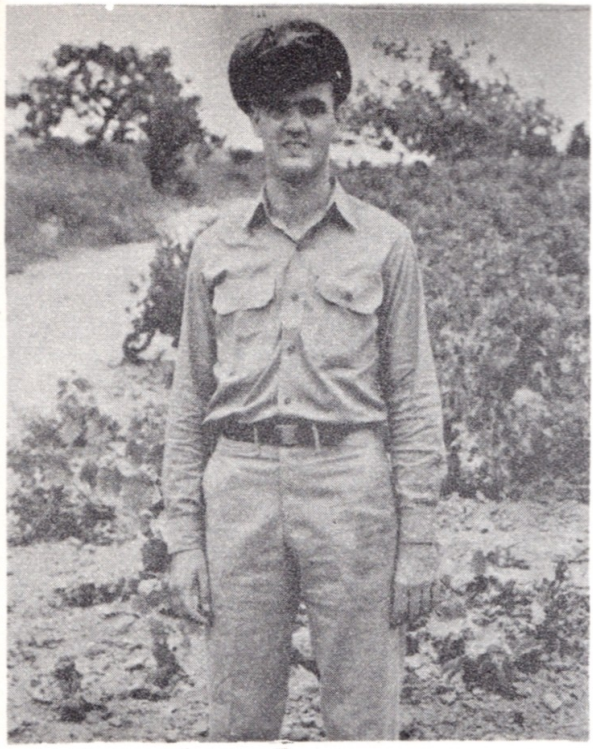
Served in Pacific Fleet, Hawaiian Area, Central America, West Indies, Morocco, Algeria, Italy, and France.

Battles and Campaigns: Invasion of Southern France.

Received National Defense Service Bar, Mediterranean Theatre Ribbon, and Good Conduct Medal.

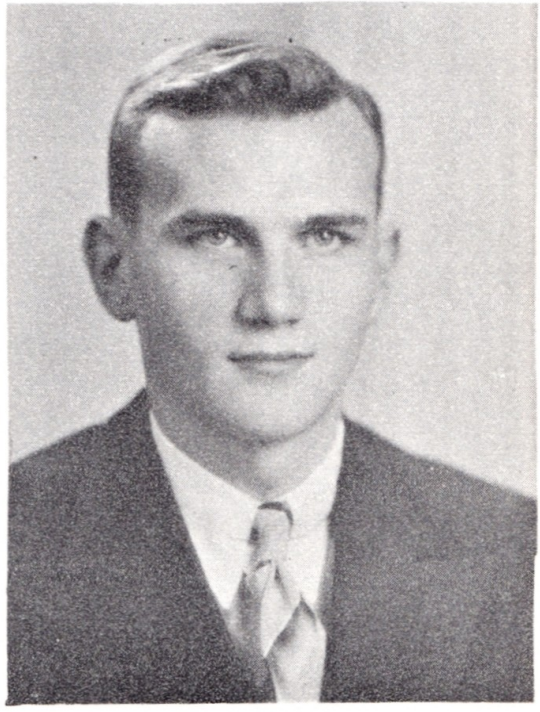
Discharged from 1st Enlistment, March 3, 1941 at San Diego, California as Radioman Second Class.

Discharged from 2nd Enlistment, October 1, 1945 at Newport Rhode Island as Chief Radio Technician.



JOSEPH P. REIS, JR.

Entered U. S. Navy, April 20, 1937 at Chicago, Illinoi:
Served in Asiatic-Pacific, North Atlantic, and Alaskan Theatres.
Battles and Campaigns: Solomons Invasion, Savo Island, and Espirito Santos.
Received Good Conduct Medal, American Defense Ribbon, Asiatic-Pacific Theatre Ribbon, American Area Theatre Ribbon, and Victory Medal.
Discharged July 13, 1947 at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania as SSMT1 2nd Grade.
Served on U. S. S. North Carolina BB55, NOB, Kodiak, Alaska, NAS, Pensacola, Florida, and USS Valley Forge CV45.



JOHN B. REIS

Entered Naval Reserve, January 6, 1942 at Federal Building, Chicago, Illinois.

Discharged April 27, 1942 at Great Lakes, Naval Hospital, as Apprentice Seaman.

CHAPTER 36

Fairbury Man Worked on Interesting WPA Project

The Great Depression (1929–1939) was an economic shock that affected most countries worldwide. It was a period of economic depression that became evident after a significant fall in stock prices in the United States. The financial contagion began around September 1929 and led to the Wall Street stock market crash of October 24 (Black Thursday). It was the most prolonged and widespread depression of the 20th century.

Unemployment levels during the Great Depression reached as high as 25 percent. President Franklin Roosevelt promised to create public jobs to offer income to out-of-work citizens.

One of President Roosevelt's job creation programs was the WPA (Works Progress Administration). This New Deal program was designed to create jobs for public works projects like parks, schools, and roads. Most of the jobs were in construction, and workers built more than 620,000 miles of streets and over 10,000 bridges, in addition to many airports and much housing.

In one of its most famous projects, Federal Project Number One, the WPA employed musicians, artists, writers, actors, and directors in arts, drama, media, and literacy projects. The five projects dedicated to these were the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), the Historical Records Survey (HRS), the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), the Federal Music Project (FMP), and the Federal Art Project (FAP).

These WPA projects impacted Livingston County. For example, people were employed to discover all the government-related documents for Livingston County. The results of this study were published in the 1940 book ***Inventory of the County Archives of Illinois***.

Unemployed writers were paid to drive around to various cities in Illinois and then write their observations. These writers went through Fairbury on Route 24 and noted the town was essentially an agricultural trading center with a local coal mine in operation. The city had a total of eight churches,

with two of the eight being Apostolic. Of the total population of 2,310 people, approximately 500 citizens attended the Apostolic churches. Their survey of Illinois cities was published in a 1939 book titled ***Illinois: A Descriptive and Historical Guide*** by the Federal Works Agency Work Projects Administration.

John Paul Yost of Pontiac received WPA funds to create a program in Pontiac for Livingston County children involving the arts and theater.

In 1929, Before the Great Depression, a book was published titled ***Roll of Honor: Record of Burial Places of Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Army Nurses of All Wars of the United States.*** This study and resultant book was created by an act passed by the Illinois State Legislature. This book includes burial information for veterans buried in Fairbury area cemeteries, including Avoca, the Catholic Cemetery, and Graceland.

The decision was made to do another study of veteran burial information in Livingston County as a WPA project. This WPA project, Federal Graves Registration Project #4043, was initiated around 1937 and finished in 1939.

Joseph P. Reis (1887-1980) was a World War I veteran and ran a dry cleaning business in Fairbury for many years. He took a part-time job as a researcher for this WPA project. Mr. Reis tried to identify the name and service record of every veteran buried in Fairbury and other parts of Livingston County. Mr. Reis sent letters to relatives of the deceased veterans to verify their military service. He then entered the information into the modern equivalent of a spreadsheet so it could be included in a new book.

In 1879, Congress passed a law stating that the U.S. government would provide a free gravestone to any veteran. Mr. Reis helped descendants complete the proper request for a free tombstone for their veteran relative.

Mr. Reis's investigative work papers dating between 1937 and 1939 were recently donated to the Fairbury Echoes Museum.

The GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) was a social club for Civil War veterans. Aaron Weider Post 75 was very active in Fairbury and donated

the two cannons that are in Veterans Memorial Park. The group disbanded when the last Fairbury Civil War veteran, August Henry Mundt, died in 1936. Unfortunately, no paper records of this group were preserved.

Mr. Reis found an old document that identified the Aaron Weider Post 75 in Fairbury had 58 members in 1899. This sheet of paper is the only known document with the GAR members' names.

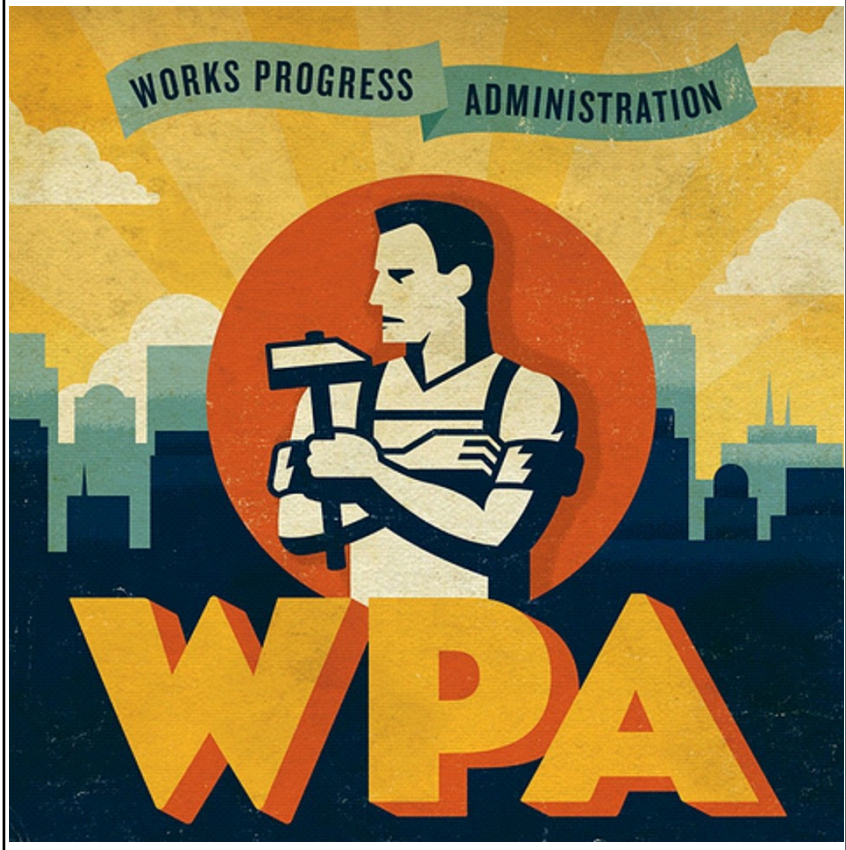
One of the most exciting cases that Mr. Reis investigated was the case of Solia Darling. A Mr. Jack Beagley of Forrest told Mr. Reis that Solia Darling served as a man during the Civil War for nine months until it was discovered she was a woman. Mr. Reis determined that Solia Darling's maiden name was Solia Hoffman, and she was born in Germany. Her parents were George Hoffman and Magdalena Quinn, and both parents were born in Germany. Solia Darling died on January 23, 1918, in Cardiff, Illinois.

Mr. Reis sent a letter to a woman who lived with Solia Darling in the Chatsworth area after the Civil War. He also sent out letters to other people who might have known her. These people responded to his letters but did not know any more details about her, except she might have lived in Baltimore for a while.

The case of Jennie Hodgers (1843-1915), who served as a man during the whole Civil War as Private Albert Cashier, is well known. After the Civil War ended, she lived in Saunemin. Her tiny house has been preserved and is on display in Saunemin. She is buried in Saunemin.

Very few known cases exist of a woman serving as a male soldier in the Civil War. Further research is needed to determine whether or not Solia Darling served in the Civil War. If it is true that Solia Darling served in the Civil War, it would make a fascinating story.

Joseph P. Reis's research results were likely incorporated into a book published between 1940 and 1941. Unfortunately, a copy of this book can not be found now. It is also possible his information was sent to Illinois or Washington, D.C. officials.



U.S. Government poster advertising the WPA Depression era program.

CHAPTER 37

Round Barns Never Really Became Popular

Round barns date back to the 18th and early 19th century. George Washington designed and built a sixteen-sided threshing barn at his Dogue Run Farm in Fairfax County, Virginia 1793. The first genuinely round barn in North America was constructed in 1826 at Hancock Shaker Village. A few other round barns appeared on the American landscape before the Civil War.

Despite considerable publicity of the 1826 Shaker barn, the design did not become popular until the 1880s, when some agricultural colleges began to push the design as they taught progressive farming methods based on the principles of industrial efficiency. Round barns were the most popular in the United States between 1880 and 1920, especially in the Midwest.

Benton Steele built several round barns in Indiana. In 1902, Mr. Steele's advertisements for building round barns caught the attention of Professor C. B. Dorsey of the University of Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station. Professor Dorsey traveled to Indiana to view the barns Steele and his associates built.

By 1908, Professor Dorsey's interest in round barns had caught the eye of his University of Illinois colleague Wilber J. Fraser. Mr. Fraser was from Plainfield, Illinois, and graduated from the University of Illinois with the Class of 1893.

Mr. Fraser was the first head of the Department of Dairy Husbandry from 1902 until 1913. He also strongly advocated the round barn, which he said offered the "economy of consideration, low maintenance, and labor efficiency." Mr. Fraser also asserted that round barns could withstand Midwest windstorms better.

The University of Illinois built three round barns south of the main campus. These barns were erected in 1908, 1910, and 1913. The first barn had a cost of $3,200 in 1908. This price would be equivalent to $106,946

in today's dollars. The third barn had a cost of $11,000 in 1913. This price would be equal to $334,173 in today's dollars.

In February of 1910, the University of Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station published Bulletin No. 143 titled ***Economy of the Round Dairy Barn*** by Wilber J. Fraser. This 45-page booklet extolled the virtues of round versus rectangular dairy barns.

Mr. Frazier also wrote a newspaper article about the advantages of round barns. This article was published in many different Midwestern newspapers. The Fairbury Blade published a copy of his article in the October 24, 1913 issue.

At least three round barns are known to be built in the Fairbury area. The first round barn built in the Fairbury area was built in 1912 by Chris Gerber (1888-1971). In 1912, Chris Gerber was a 24-year-old farmer. Chris built a new barn on his farm eight miles south of Fairbury. Rather than making the traditional rectangular framed barn, Chris used the latest round barn technology. Chris's barn was 70 feet in diameter and 20 feet to the eaves. It was also equipped with a 12-foot by 42-foot silo in the center of the barn. Unfortunately, the unique round barn Chris built burned down in March 1957.

A 1915 Pantagraph article reported three round barns south of Fairbury, including Chris Gerber's round barn. In 1912, Mr. C. L. Fitzgerald and a carpenter built a 52-foot diameter round barn with 16 feet to the eaves. His farm was 10 miles southwest of Fairbury and five miles west of Chris Gerber's round barn. Mr. Fitzgerald reported that he liked operating his round barn but would not build another one because it was too hard to construct.

Another 1915 Pantagraph article reported that Mr. D. O. Travis built a 50-foot-diameter round barn close to Mr. Fitzgerald's farm. The Travis barn was built in 1914.

Another round barn was built on the west side of Champaign around 1914. The Round Barn Restaurant was a popular and fascinating place to dine for many years. A Famous Dave's barbecue franchise was the last business to operate in the old round barn. This barn has been sitting vacant for more

than ten years. The current owners are trying to find someone to run a new business in this round barn.

Matthias Jacobsen Diemer (1877-1952) was born in Union Township in Livingston County. Jacob C. Diemer (1846-1926) and Gede Maria Petersen (1854-1924) were his parents. Both of Matthias's parents were born in Denmark.

Matthias J. Diemer attended Pontiac schools. Mr. Diemer never married and farmed for about 40 years south of Pontiac. Mr. Diemer saw the round barn built in West Champaign and decided to create one on his farm. In 1918, Mr. Diemer hired Emmanuel McCoy Sr. and his brother, Clinton, to construct a barn similar to what later became The Round Barn restaurant in Champaign.

This barn was built south of the Pontiac Correctional Center in 1919. This round barn had a 54-foot diameter and originally had cedar shingles. In 1982, the Illinois State Historical Society took on an initiative to have round barns added to the National Register of Historic Places. Round barn enthusiast H. Wayne Price was the chairman of the "Save Our Barns Committee" of the Illinois State Historical Society. He determined there were 55 round barns still standing in the State of Illinois. Mr. Price and two Illinois State Historic Preservation Office representatives determined that seven of these 55 barns met the proper criteria to be added to the National Register of Historic Places. One of the seven round barns selected was the Raymond Schultz round barn built by Matthias J. Diemer. The application to add these seven round barns to the National Register was approved in 1982, and property number 82002582 was assigned to this collection of seven round barns.

The application to add these seven round barns to the National Register noted that the most extensive round barns ever built in Illinois had 100-foot diameters and 80-foot heights. The application also stated the Schultz barn was one of the last round barns built in Illinois.

A 1984 Pantagraph article about the Schultz round barn reported that Mr. Diemer willed the round barn and the surrounding 81.54 acres to the Moody Bible Institute in 1952. Raymond and Betty Schultz bought the

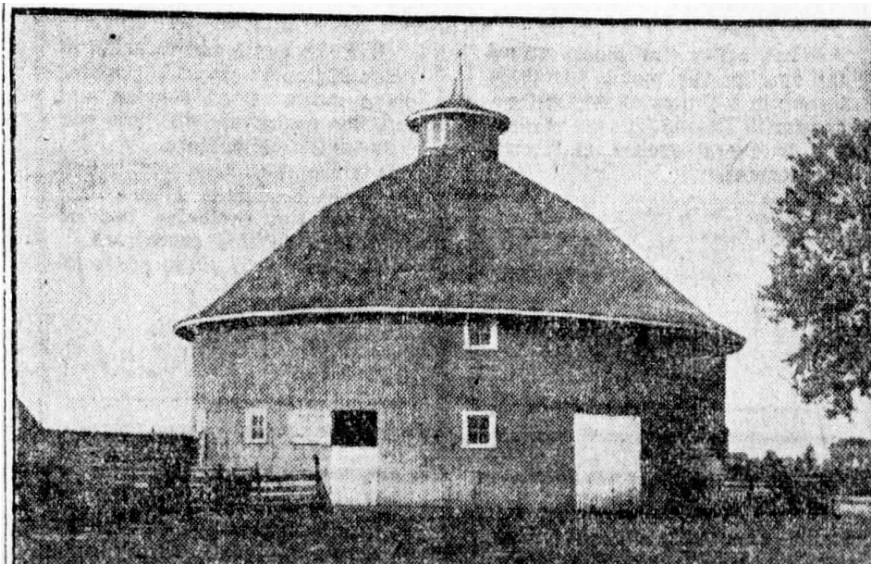
round barn and the farm from the Moody Bible Institute in 1955. They reported the round barn was in excellent condition when they bought it.

Although the University of Illinois heavily pushed the round barn design, it never became popular. There were several reasons why they did not become the predominant barn design in Illinois. Traditionally, a farmer's neighbors would help him build a conventional rectangular post and beam-type barn in a few days. Because people were unfamiliar with the building techniques required to create a round barn, a farmer and his neighbors would struggle to build the more complicated design.

Carpenters were also used to the construction of conventional rectangular barns. They resisted building round barns because they would likely lose money until they went through the "Learning Curve" and became proficient at making them.

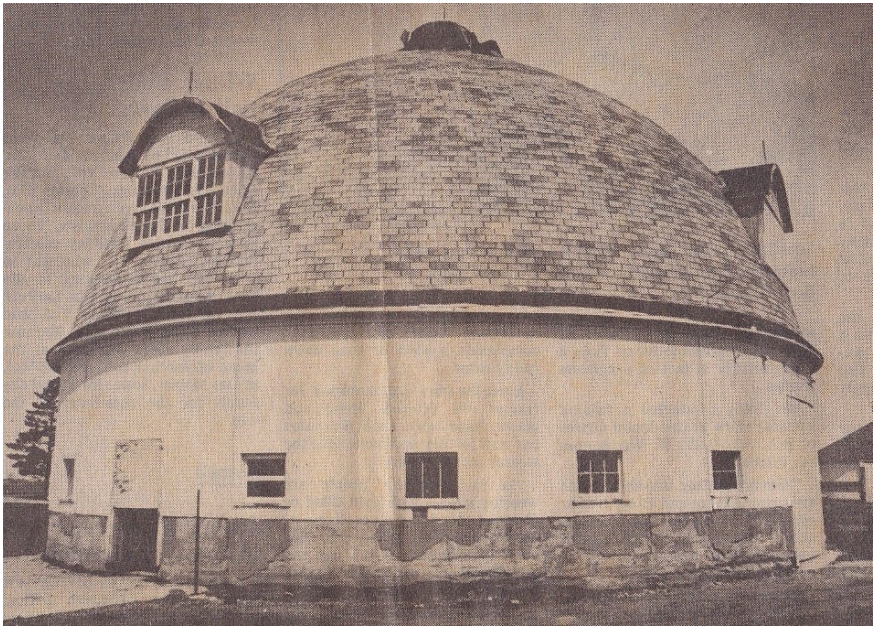
Farmers started to use electricity in the 1920s. Most farms received electricity in the 1930s during the Great Depression as part of the federal government Rural Electrification Administration program. Electrified dairy equipment was then designed for rectangular barns because they were the predominant type of barn design.

The few remaining round barns in Illinois are very interesting to view compared to the conventional rectangular barns. The number of these round barns still standing declines yearly as Mother Nature takes its toll on these wooden structures.

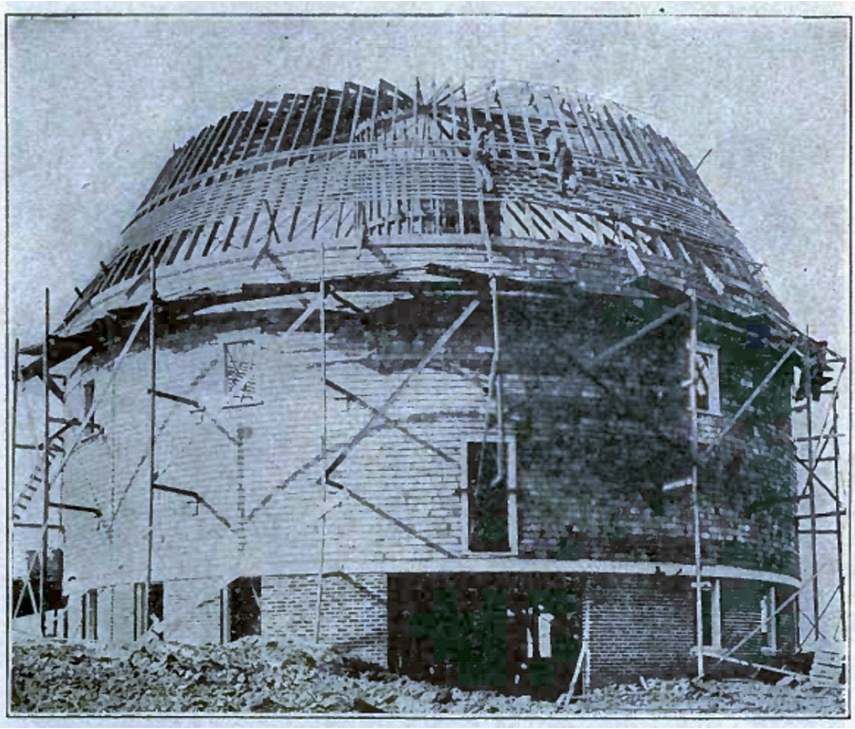


June 1915 photograph of the 52 foot diameter round barn on the C. L. Fitzgerald farm southwest of Fairbury.

1976 photograph of the Round Barn Restaurant in Champaign, Illinois.



1984 photograph of the Raymond and Betty Schultz round barn south of the Pontiac Correctional Center.



One of the three round barns at the University of Illinois under construction from the 1910 Bulletin No. 143 ***Economy of the Round Dairy Barn*** by Wilbur J. Fraser.

CHAPTER 38

Cathryn Frisby Family Has Deep Roots in Fairbury Area

Cathryn Frisby is 102 years of age. She is one of the few surviving teachers who taught in both country schools and the Fairbury school system. Her family's story began with Christian Wink's birth in 1830 near Marburg, Germany. His parents were Herman Wink and Margaret Eichenbradt. The Wink family liked to recycle the first names of Christian and Herman in subsequent generations.

In 1833, Elizabeth Arnold was born near Marburg, Germany. In 1858, she emigrated from Germany to St. Louis when she was 25. Elizabeth left Bremen, Germany, on a ship named "Carl." It took 57 days to make the voyage to New Orleans. She arrived on October 13, 1858, and traveled up the Mississippi River to St. Louis.

Also, in 1858, Christian Wink emigrated from Germany to St. Louis. In 1859, Christian Wink married Elizabeth Arnold in St. Louis. He was 29, and Elizabeth was 26 when they married. Christian and Elizabeth Wink had nine children. They lived in St. Louis, Granville, and La Rose, Illinois. They settled in Eppards Point Township northwest of Fairbury in 1869. Christian and Elizabeth Wink saw the native prairies of Illinois converted into farmland.

Herman Wink, one of the nine children of Christian and Elizabeth Wink, was born in 1861. In 1889, Herman Wink married Marie Eichenlamb. Herman was 28, and Marie was 26 when they married. Herman and Marie Wink had four children.

In 1916, Elizabeth Wink, wife of Christian Wink, died at 82. Merkle & Son of Peoria made many of the fancier and more expensive gravestones in Graceland Cemetery. After Elizabeth Wink died, her husband hired Merkle & Son to create a unique stone for her burial location. The 1917 issue of Monument Reporter magazine noted the monument was made of rough-hewn stone and was one of the finest ever erected in the Fairbury Cemetery. This unique stone has a cross, an anchor, a Greek column, and

various fauna. It is located southeast of the Mausoleum. In 1920, Christian Wink died at 90 and was buried with his wife in Graceland.

Christian Elmer "Bud" Wink was one of the four children of Herman and Marie Wink. Bud was born in 1892 in Eppards Point Township. America entered World War I when it declared war on Germany on December 7, 1917.

Bud Wink was inducted into the Army at Pontiac on April 3, 1918. After completing his basic training, he sailed from Boston to Tilbury Docks in England on Leicestershire. Bud went to Bordeaux, France, and trained from September 2 until the war ended on November 11, 1918. Bud sailed back to America and was discharged from Camp Grant in Rockford on March 6, 1919.

In 1920, Bud Wink married Florence Lorine Shepherd. Bud was 28, and Florence was 27 when they married. Bud and Florence Wink had two daughters. Cathryn L. Wink was born in 1921, and her sister, Mary Ellen Wink, was born in 1923.

America entered into the Great Depression in 1929, and it lasted for about ten years. Cathryn and her sister Mary Ellen Wink experienced the Great Depression from approximately age seven through seventeen, living on a farm northeast of Fairbury.

Francis Townsend was born in a log cabin east of Fairbury in 1867. He lived in Fairbury until he was about 18 years of age. Townsend later became a medical doctor. During the start of the Great Depression, he looked out the window of his house in California and saw three older women scrounging through the trash, looking for food. Francis Townsend got the idea of creating a national old-age pension plan. Under his program, citizens over 60 would receive a government pension equivalent to $47,000 in today's dollars.

Townsend began to promote his Townsend Plan for an old-age pension. It was wildly popular, and 3,400 Townsend Clubs sprung up overnight nationwide. His political movement put massive pressure on President Roosevelt to adopt some old-age pension plan. This political pressure caused President Franklin D. Roosevelt to sign the original Social Security

Act into law in 1935. On January 31, 1940, the first monthly retirement check was issued to Ida May Fuller of Ludlow, Vermont, for $22.54.

Townsend returned to Fairbury nine times from 1939 to 1947. The city celebrated this native son's return with events called Townsend Homecomings. Townsend usually gave a speech at the fairgrounds.

Bud Wink liked history and collected many historical items. According to his daughter Cathryn, Bud told his daughter that history was being made and, therefore, Cathryn would accompany him to listen to Francis Townsend speak in Fairbury.

In 1940, Cathryn Frisby started the two-year teacher training program at Illinois State Normal University. After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States declared war on Japan. Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S. a few days later, and the nation became fully engaged in the Second World War.

In 1942, Cathryn Frisby finished her college program and began teaching near Peoria. The Caterpillar Tractor Co. needed as many workers as possible to produce military goods for World War II. Cathryn took a part-time job working for Caterpillar. Company officials initially wanted her to work in the office since she had a teaching background. Cathryn insisted that she could run a machine tool in the factory, so she became a factory worker.

In 1942, George William "Bill" Frisby enlisted in the Reserve Corps Signal Training program. He served in the European theater and received many medals. He was discharged from Camp Grant on December 13, 1945, and was a Technician Third Grade. Bill Frisby's parents were Frank Frisby (1884-1947) and Iva E. Pool (1884-1951).

Herman Wink died in 1947 at the age of 85. One year later, his wife, Katherine Wink, died at 81. They were buried in Graceland Cemetery. Also, in 1948, Bill Frisby married Cathryn Wink. He was 28, and she was 26 when they married. Bill and Cathryn had three children.

Around 1948, all the country schools closed in Livingston County because there were no longer enough farm children to justify the country school

system. Many teachers in the country schools switched to teaching in Fairbury schools. These teachers included Cathryn Frisby. Mrs. Frisby taught at Westview Grade School until she retired.

In 1983, Bud Wink died at the age of 91. His wife, Florence Wink, died in 1989 at 96. John R. Goold, wife of Mary Ellen Goold, died in 2007 at 88. Bill Frisby passed away in 2009 at the age of 89. Mary Ellen Goold died at the age of 99 in 2022.

Cathryn Frisby recently celebrated her 102nd birthday. Longevity runs in Cathryn's family. Her relatives who led long lives included her sister at 99 years, her mother at 96, and her maternal grandmother at 104.

Many local area citizens have fond memories of having Cathryn Frisby as their teacher, including students at country schools and Westview Grade School. Cathryn Frisby was a very positive influence on two generations of Fairbury area students.

Very unusual Wink grave stone at Graceland Cemetery in Fairbury.

Cathryn Frisby reminiscing with some of her former students at the Chenoa Family Restaurant in 2014.

CHAPTER 39

Interesting Life of Della Baker

One of the most fascinating stories back in 1888 was when fourteen-year-old Della Baker ran away from home for a few days. This story caught the town's attention because she was the daughter of the Fairbury Postmaster.

Della Baker had a fascinating life experience. Her family story began with the birth of her father, William Eugene Baker, in 1839 in Canandaigua, New York. William Baker was the son of Increase Baker (1807-1876) and Julia Canfield (1817-1904). William Baker moved with his parents from New York to Cincinnati, Ohio, when he was a young boy.

When William Baker was 20 years old, he moved to Livingston County to farm some land his father had purchased in Broughton and Sullivan Townships. Four years after he arrived in Livingston County, William Baker married Sarah Z. Chesebro. William was 24, and Sarah was 17 when they married. Sarah was the daughter of Saxton B. Chesebro (1819-1902) and Isabelle Harbison (1825-1912). William and Sarah Baker had seven children.

One of William and Sarah Baker's children was Stevens R. Baker (1878-1966). He was eventually elected a Judge in Livingston County. Another child was Patricia "Della" Baker. Della was born in 1874 when the family lived in Dwight.

In 1880, the William Baker family moved to Fairbury. Mr. Baker served as a Supervisor of Indian Grove Township. He was the Fairbury Postmaster under President Grover Cleveland's first administration for four years. The Baker family attended the Catholic Church in Fairbury.

In 1888, fourteen-year-old Della Baker ran away from home. The Ottawa Free Trader newspaper reported she had walked from her house in Fairbury to Weston and then on to Chenoa. At Chenoa, she bought a train ticket to Peoria, then took a train to Decatur. Her whereabouts after Decatur were unknown. The newspaper reported, "Someone had either lured her away or has given herself up too freely to French novels."

Della was found safe at a St. Louis Convent a few days later. The Sisters at the Convent were paid the $200 reward for finding her. This reward would be equal to $6,700 in today's dollars. Della was returned to Fairbury. Della resumed attending Fairbury Township High School.

Two years after she ran away from home, William Baker resigned as Postmaster. He started a four-year term as Livingston County Treasurer in Pontiac. Della remained in school at Fairbury Township High School. In March 1891, the Blade reported that Della was one of the top 20 students in the entire high school.

In 1896, Della Baker married George R. Longmyre. She was 21, and he was 32 when they married. George Longmyre was the son of pioneer Livingston County settlers David H. Longmyre (1825-1920) and Mariah Royal (1825-1911). The Longmyre family arrived in 1854 in Sullivan Township. George Longmyre farmed in Sullivan Township. George and Della Longmyre had three children.

In 1897, the first child of George and Della Longmyre was born, and they named her Constance Helen Longmyre. One year later, Emery E. Longmyre joined the family.

The third and last child of George and Della Longmyre was Ellis George Longmyre. He was born in 1900. Unfortunately, this child died at the age of two.

In 1906, George Longmyre made a trip to New Mexico. Shortly after he arrived in New Mexico, George died at the age of 43. George was buried in Pontiac's South Side Cemetery. Della was 32 years of age when she became a widow. When their father died, Constance Longmyre was nine, and Emery was eight. The family continued to live in Pontiac.

Della married Peter Joseph Schumm in 1910 in Kalispell, Montana. Peter was 32, and Della was 36 when they married. They had no children. Della attended and graduated from State Normal College in Montana and became a teacher for 23 years there.

After just two years of marriage, Peter J. Schumm died in Montana at the age of 34. Della was 38 when her second husband died. His death certificate reported that he died from an accidental gunshot. After Peter died, Della continued teaching school in Montana.

On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on the German Empire, nearly three years after World War I started. Emery Longmyre enlisted in the U.S. Navy in April 1917. Emery served on the USS Brooklyn as a Seaman 2nd Class.

Constance Longmyre, daughter of Della, married Mark P. Lyons in April of 1918 in Montana. Her brother, Emery Longmyre, could not attend her wedding because he was still serving in the U.S. Navy. Constance and Mark Lyons had no children.

World War I ended in November 1918. Emery Longmyre was released from the U.S. Navy in November 1918. Della was likely very relieved that her only living son had survived World War I.

Constance Longmyre was only married to Mark Lyons for four years. In 1922, Constance married Gunard "Erik" Bjork in Spokane, Washington. Constance and Erik Bjork had two sons. In 1923, Della became a grandmother with the birth of Lloyd Emery Bjork (1923-1995). She became a grandmother again in 1926 with the advent of Donald Dale Bjork (1926-2004).

Emery Longmyre married Irene Murphy in Santa Rosa, California. Emery was 27, and Irene was 33 when they married. They had no children.

When 1934 began, life for Della was good. She was a schoolteacher in Montana. Della's daughter Constance was happily married to Erik Bjork and had two grandsons from their union. Her son Emery was happily married to Irene and lived in California.

Unfortunately, tragedy struck Della's family in March of 1934. Her son Emery and his wife Irene went horseback riding by William's Creek in the mountains in northern California. They went riding about eight miles east of Covelo, California. A storm caused the creek to flood. Both Emery and Irene Longmyre were drowned when they tried to cross the flooded creek.

A local newspaper reported that Mr. Longmyre's body was found lodged in a tree about 2 feet above the current water level. Irene's body was found on a bank 200 feet downstream from where Emery's body was found. Emery was 36, and Irene was 42 when they drowned.

In 1944, Della was 70 years old. She moved from Montana to California to live with her daughter Constance Bjork. Della died in 1963 at the age of 89. She was buried in Palo Alto, California.

Della Baker led an interesting life. She ran away from home at age 14 but became an excellent student after she returned to Fairbury. Della eventually became a successful school teacher in Montana. Della experienced many tragic losses, including two husbands, a two-year-old son, and her grown son and his wife. She got to experience the joy of having two grandsons.

Miss Della Baker, the pretty little fourteen year old daughter of the postmaster at Fairbury, has disappeared and all traces of her have been lost. She left home on Sunday, Nov. 3rd, saying that her head ached and she wanted fresh air. She walked to Weston and thence to Chenoa, where she got a ticket to Peoria. She then went to Decatur and then utterly disappeared. It is believed that she is either in St. Louis or Kansas City, and has either been lured away by someone or has given herself up too freely to French novels.

Article in November 17, 1888, Ottawa Free Trader newspaper about missing Fairbury girl.

CHAPTER 40

Fairbury's Connection to the Florida Seminole Wars

Fairbury has many interesting connections. For example, two Fairbury men, Edward Von Tobel and Jake Beckley, helped to found the city of Las Vegas. Another interesting connection between Fairbury and the Shedd family that built the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago also exists.

There is another interesting connection between Fairbury and the Florida Seminole Wars. The story of this connection began with the first farmers who settled in the Fairbury area. These farmers had had two alternatives for paying for their farmland. The first alternative was to pay the federal government cash for their land. The official federal government price was $1.25 an acre from 1830 until 1850. By 1850, the official government price was increased to $2.50 per acre. In today's dollars, the price in 1850 of $2.50 per acre would be equivalent to $79 per acre.

In 1850, Congress passed the Script Warrant Act. This law awarded 40 acres to veterans of past wars. The past wars included the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and all Indian Wars. The vast majority of men included in this land grant were veterans of the War of 1812.

Most of the veterans of the War of 1812 lived on the East Coast of the United States. When Congress awarded them the land in 1850, these veterans were over 60 years old. Most of these veterans had no interest in moving from their homes on the East Coast to swampland in Central Illinois. Instead of claiming their Illinois land, most veterans sold their land patents to farmers who did want to move to Illinois. Veterans sold their land rights for about 30 cents an acre, which was only 12 cents on the dollar of the official government price of $2.50 per acre.

Much of Fairbury's farmland was purchased using military veteran land patents in the 1850s. One example was John Bodley Sr., who moved from Indiana to Lodemia, northwest of Fairbury. In 1853, Mr. Bodley bought 40 acres using a land patent issued to John Huffman. Mr. Huffman was a

Private in Captain McManigle's Company of the Pennsylvania Militia in the War of 1812. This land has remained in the same family and is owned by Marjorie Maley today.

Another example of using a military veteran land patent was the case of William McDowell. Mr. McDowell and his family were among the earliest settlers in the Fairbury area, and they settled north of Fairbury in 1832. Mr. McDowell served as a Private in Captain Lindsey's Company in the Ohio Militia during the War of 1832. Unfortunately, Mr. McDowell died just a couple of years after arriving in Fairbury and is buried in the Avoca Cemetery. Later, in 1850, Congress passed the Script Warrant Act, which awarded William McDowell 40 acres north of Fairbury. Since Mr. McDowell was deceased, the government awarded his land to his widow, Sarah McDowell, in 1854.

The State of Florida has a fascinating history. Spain initially claimed this state, and St. Augustine is one of the oldest cities in the United States. As the Europeans started to occupy the East Coast states, many Native Americans fled south to Florida. Although these Native Americans came from different tribes, they were eventually called the Seminole tribe.

The U.S. Government initiated the Seminole War with the Florida Native Americans. Historians identify three different wars which occurred between 1816 and 1858. The first war forced the Native Americans into one reservation in central Florida. The second war tried to force all Native Americans to leave the state and move to reservations out west. The third Seminole War forced the few remaining Native Americans from the state.

In the Seminole Wars, some Native Americans from the Creek tribe joined the U.S. Government military forces and became soldiers. After the Seminole War ended, the surviving Creek soldiers were considered veterans of the Florida War and were eligible to receive 40 acres for their service to the United States.

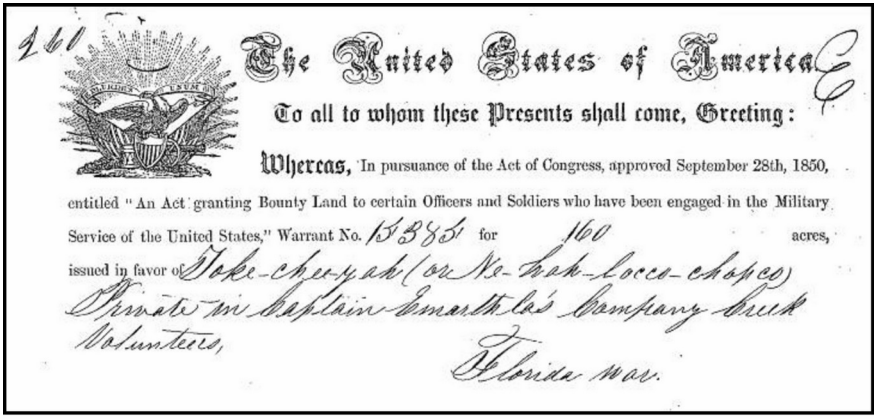
The land on which the Dos Fuentes Mexican restaurant is now located has a fascinating history. In the 1880s, Rufus Straight had his home and a vast clay tile factory situated on this land. Later, the Old Susannah restaurant was built on this site. The Westgate restaurant replaced it and eventually became the Dos Fuentes restaurant.

The database of land purchases maintained by the Federal Bureau of Land Management shows that David Magie purchased this land on July 1, 1854. David Magie purchased many tracts of land west of Fairbury. He was one of the three farmers who competed to have the new Peoria & Oquawka Railroad run through his farm. The successful farmer who had the tracks run through his farm could convert his inexpensive farmland to city building lots and make a great deal of money. Mr. Magie lost the competition to Caleb Patton, who promised railroad engineer Octave Chanute half the city lots if Chanute chose to run the railroad through his farm.

David Magie used military veteran land patents to purchase the land where Dos Fuentes restaurant is now located. The names of the two veterans were Toke-Chee-Yah and Ne-Hah-Locco-Chopco. They were members of the Creek Tribe and served as Privates under the command of Captain Emarthla in the Florida Wars. These two Creek tribe members had no interest in moving to the swampland in the Fairbury area and likely sold their land rights for the market price of 30 cents per acre.

The Federal Bureau of Land Management database shows that David Magie bought 15 different parcels of land around Fairbury. Mr. Magie used military veteran land patents to make all of his purchases. David Magie bought four parcels using land rights issued to four veterans of the War of 1812. Magie used military veteran land rights given to 10 different Creek tribe members who were veterans of the Florida Wars to make his other nine purchases. These ten Creek men served in the Alabama Volunteers under Captains Emarthla, Talmary, Harjo, and Fixico.

It is a fascinating story of how farmland on Fairbury's west side is connected to the Creek Native American tribe members and the Seminole Wars in Florida. The land where the Dos Fuentes Mexican restaurant is now located was first owned by members of the Creek Native American tribe from Florida.



160

The United States of America

To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting:

Whereas, In pursuance of the Act of Congress, approved September 28th, 1850, entitled "An Act granting Bounty Land to certain Officers and Soldiers who have been engaged in the Military Service of the United States," Warrant No. 15385 for 160 acres, issued in favor of Toke-chey-ah (or Ne-hah-locco-chapco) Private in Captain Emarth's Company Creek Volunteers,

Florida War.

Top portion of 1854 land patent transferring 160 acres from two veterans of the Florida War to David Magie.

CHAPTER 41

Dos Fuentes Mexican Restaurant Location Has Interesting History

Many Fairbury citizens remember the Old Susannah Restaurant and its successor, the Westgate Supper Club.

In 1957, Edward Metz (1900-1985) owned 80 acres of farmland in the northeast corner of Section 9 in Indian Grove Township. This land was originally owned by two members of the Creek Native American tribe who fought on the side of the United States in the Seminole Wars in Florida. Mr. Metz was 57 years old in 1957.

In 1958, Raymond H. Crook managed the Honegger House on West Locust Street. Fairbury's new City Hall now occupies the place where the Honegger House used to be. Before operating the Honegger House, Mr. Crook and his brother managed the Gabriel Tea Room in Oak Park, Illinois.

By 1958, Darol Johnston (1918-2019) had a successful dental practice in Fairbury. "Doc" Johnston was a World War II Navy Veteran. Doc Johnston was 40 years old in 1958.

In 1958, William "Bill" Weber (1921-1996) was a 37-year-old plumber working for the E. L. Payne Plumbing Company. Five years later, E. L. Payne retired and sold the plumbing business to Bill Weber.

In 1959, these four men decided to build a new restaurant on land owned by Edward Metz, and they named their new restaurant the Old Susannah. Mr. Crook announced the new restaurant would have an Early American theme, similar to the Gabriel Tea Room in Oak Park.

The new restaurant would be located in Livingston County and not within the city limits of Fairbury. At that time, Livingston County had a maximum of 10 liquor licenses, and they were all utilized. The Green Parrott tavern in Pontiac had a county liquor license, but they no longer

needed it when the tavern was annexed into Pontiac city limits. Old Susannah was granted the county liquor license the Green Parrot used to have.

In 1959, the latest record-playing technology was called a stereophonic record-playing system. Stereophonic sound was a method of sound reproduction that recreated a multi-directional, 3-dimensional audible perspective. Mr. Crook announced the Old Susannah restaurant would be equipped with this latest technology.

In July of 1959, Mr. Crook placed ads in the Pontiac Daily Leader to hire waitresses and cooks for the Old Susannah restaurant. The ad stated that waitresses should make about $75 per week. This pay would equal $774 per week in today's dollars.

The Old Susannah restaurant opened around August of 1959. Record Printing printed grand opening brochures in Fairbury. These brochures listed the four corporate officers of the Old Susannah restaurant. These officers included Bill Weber, President; Ed Metz, Vice-President; Darol Johnston, Secretary; and Raymond Crook, Manager.

In 1961, a new eight-lane bowling alley was added to the Old Susannah restaurant. The bowling alley owners were Bill Weber and Dr. D. H. Johnston. Many local businesses sponsored bowling leagues for many years.

The Old Susannah was a very popular restaurant in the 1960s. Many family events and business meetings were held at the restaurant. The October 3, 1968, edition of the Blade announced that Bill Weber and Doc Johnston sold the restaurant and bowling alley to Chuck and Ella Holforty. By this time, Ed Metz and Raymond Crook were no longer in partnership with Bill Weber and Doc Johnston.

In the early hours of Sunday night, April 28, 1974, the Old Susannah restaurant caught fire and burned down. The fire department was able to save the bowling alley. The Old Susannah restaurant was rebuilt and continued to operate as a restaurant.

In 1981, the Blade reported that the Old Susannah restaurant had been sold and would be renamed the Westgate Supper Club and Bowling Lanes. The restaurant had been closed for several months when the former owner, Kris Rejonen, left Fairbury. The new owners were Mr. and Mrs. Don Janney. They operated Janney's Supper Club & Bowling Alley in Flanagan. Sam Pica of Abington was in partnership with Mr. and Mrs. Janney. Westgate continued to be a popular restaurant.

In 1992, John Strong started his Marchelloni Pizza business on the east end of Locust Street at 405 E. Locust. This location was convenient for high school students because the high school was only a few blocks north of the Locust and Seventh Street intersection.

In March of 1998, the Blade reported the Westgate restaurant had been sold, and the name would be changed to J & D's Place. Westgate owner Sam Pica sold the restaurant to Jeff and Debbie Seyller of Peoria. Mr. Seyller was previously the head of operations of a Long John Silver's franchise for six years. The Seyllers considered Fairbury the ideal location for a restaurant because it was a financially secure small town, had friendly people, and was on a commuting trail.

Around 2002, Mr. Strong decided to buy the much larger Westgate restaurant and move his pizza business to that location. The pizza buffet at the new location of 1005 W. Oak Street was very popular with customers. The name was changed from Westgate to Marchelloni Pizza.

In 2004, John Strong invested $100,000 to upgrade the kitchen so he could begin to offer fried chicken and steak on his menu. The restaurant was open from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday to Thursday and 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Prices were $2 to $5 for breakfast and $4 to $9 for lunch.

In 2018, John Strong decided he wanted to downsize his business. Marchelloni Pizza moved from the Route 24 location back to its original location on the east end of Locust Street. On April 4, 2018, the Dos Fuentes Mexican restaurant opened for business. In it's first five years in business, Dos Fuentes has proven to be a very popular restaurant with its customers.

In 2019, the bowling alley was closed. All of the bowling related equipment was sold and removed from the building. The bowling alley had been in business in Fairbury for 58 years.

The restaurant and bowling alley have provided food and entertainment to Fairbury area customers for over six decades. Dos Fuentes continues this tradition and offers excellent food and service to area customers.

A NEW Place---

With an old atmosphere

ENJOY AN EVENING AT

OLD SUSANNAH

ROUTE 24—FAIRBURY, ILL.

You'll find it a NEW ADVENTURE
in Eating and Drinking

Now Open

5 to 12 p.m. Weekdays
Sundays—12 noon to
7:30 p.m.
Closed Tuesdays

Dinners
5 to 9 p.m.

A la carte to 12 midnight

RESERVATIONS IF DESIRED—Phone Fairbury 133

1959 newspaper ad for the Old Susannah restaurant.

WE WELCOME YOU TO THE OH SUSANNAH

ENTREE

STEAKS FROM THE BROILER

NEW YORK STRIP SIRLOIN	4.95
T-BONE — *U. S. Choice*	4.75
FILLET MIGNON	4.95
LADIES' FILLET	3.35
TOP SIRLOIN	4.10
8-oz. BEEF TENDERLOIN	3.75

SEA FOODS & FISH

BROILED AFRICAN LOBSTER TAILS	5.55
FRENCH FRIED SHRIMP	2.60
ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAINBOW TROUT	2.55

CHICKEN

CHICKEN *(all White Meat - 25c extra)*	2.30
CHICKEN LIVERS	1.75

DELICIOUS MEATS from OVEN or GRILL

★ROAST PRIME RIB OF BEEF, *Au Jus*	4.00
2 GRILLED CENTER CUT PORK CHOPS	3.35
GRILLED SMOKED HAM	2.30

*Fridays and Saturdays only.

All Dinners Include:

Cheese Dip and Cracker Basket
Choice — Apple Juice, Tomato Juice, Soup d'jour
SALAD — Tossed (choice of dressing)
POTATO — Baked - French Fries - Hash Browns
Fresh Bread — Butter Drink

ONION RINGS — *Plate - .60*
Platter - 1.00

Hours — Sunday
Buffet - 11:30 - 2:30

Hours — Week Days
Dinners - 5:00 - 10:30 p.m.
a la Carte - 10:30 - 12:00

CHAPTER 42

The Origins of the Brucker Family in Cropsey

Every small town is predominated by a few family surnames, which are the most common. In Fairbury, the Steidinger family is among the most predominant family surnames. In Cropsey, the Brucker surname has dominated for many decades.

The story of the Brucker family began with the birth of Gottlieb Frederick Brucker on January 23, 1832, in Weitzburg, Germany. He was the son of Frederick and Euricka Brucker. His mother died when he was only five years old. His father owned and conducted a bakery. Gottlieb assisted his father in the bakery as a young man. In 1853, when Gottlieb was twenty-one, he came to America. Gottlieb's ship took seven weeks to travel across the Atlantic to New York City. Gottlieb lived in New Orleans, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. He then worked for the U.S. Government in building Fort Riley in Kansas. Gottlieb then worked on farms in Peoria and Tazewell Counties, Illinois.

In 1858, at age 26, Gottlieb married 21-year-old Miss Katharine Anna Glabe in Peoria. Miss Katharine Glabe was born in 1837 in Niederanlan, Germany. She was the daughter of Henry and Anna Margaret Glabe. Her father died when she was four or five years old.

Mr. and Mrs. Brucker were very poor when they were married. He had $40 and she had $30. Mrs. Brucker loaned her $30 to her mother, who could not repay it for several years. Forty dollars in 1858 would equal $1,388 in today's dollars.

They started housekeeping with minimal furniture and only had two horses to start farming. They spent the first four years of married life in Congerville, Illinois. From there, they moved to Peoria, Illinois in 1862. They then moved to Morton, Illinois, in 1864.

In 1866, they moved to the Cropsey area. Most of the land was virgin prairie with very few houses. When Gottlieb and Katharine Brucker moved to Cropsey, they had four children.

The day the Gottlieb Brucker family moved to Cropsey was very stormy. Their new house had just two rooms. The family used blankets to cover the windows to shut out the cold. They bought a farm that had 240 acres and paid $15 an acre. This price would equal $308 per acre in today's dollars.

Gottlieb and Katherine Brucker eventually had a total of eleven children. Unfortunately, two of their children did not live to adulthood. Daughter Elizabeth died at age seven, and son William died at the age of five months.

In 1891, when Gottlieb Brucker was 59 years old, the Pantagraph reported that he owned farmland in both Livingston and Ford counties. The article said that Gottlieb Brucker purchased a farm in Ford or Livingston County yearly.

The Pantagraph reported in February 1898 that it was a joyous time at the Gottlieb Brucker home in Cropsey. A double wedding was performed at the Gottlieb Brucker residence. John Brucker married Miss Mary Lang, and Emma Brucker married Ernest Lang. Both grooms were young farmers in the Cropsey area.

A few months after the double wedding, the Pantagraph reported on Gottlieb Brucker's plan to give each of his nine children 160 acres of farmland. The article noted that Gottlieb Brucker was born in Germany, and he settled in Cropsey when all the farmland was still unbroken prairie. Gottlieb became one of the area's largest landowners through hard work and astute real estate transactions. In 1898, Gottlieb was 66, and his wife Katherine was 61 when they implemented their plan to give each child 160 acres.

A 1902 Pantagraph article reported that Gottlieb Brucker and his nine children owned 4,500 acres of farmland. The article recounted that Gottlieb paid $15 per acre for the first farm he purchased in 1866. By 1902, the price of land had increased to $110 an acre.

The article recounted that Gottlieb had accumulated this immense amount of land by solely raising grain. The paper reported that Gottlieb never sold

a carload of cattle or hogs. Gottlieb stuck to corn and oats all the years he farmed.

Gottlieb Brucker took great pleasure in giving his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren a silver dollar each Christmas day.

In 1908, Gottlieb Brucker died at 76 at his home in Cropsey. Mr. Brucker's obituary in the Pantagraph noted that Gottlieb and his children owned over 4,550 acres in the Cropsey area at his death.

Katherine Brucker died in 1910 at the age of 72. Gottlieb and Katherine Brucker had fifty-five grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren when she died. Both Gottlieb and Katherine Brucker were buried in the Cropsey cemetery.

The descendants of Gottlieb and Katherine Brucker started to hold family reunions in 1922. From 1922 to 1930, these reunions were held at Miller Park in Bloomington. The reunion location was changed to Gibson City Park, Gibson City, starting in 1931.

The family also started to compile a book with the entire genealogy of the Brucker family. This book is titled ***The Families of Gottlieb Frederick Brucker & Katharine Anna Glabe***. The book was last updated in 2004 by Mary O. Stein. By 2004, the Brucker family tree was so large that it took about 170 pages to list all the descendants in the book.

The Gottlieb and Katherine Brucker family is another example of how some of our pioneer settlers could start with nothing and end up very wealthy. The family worked extremely hard and accumulated over 4,500 acres in the Cropsey area.

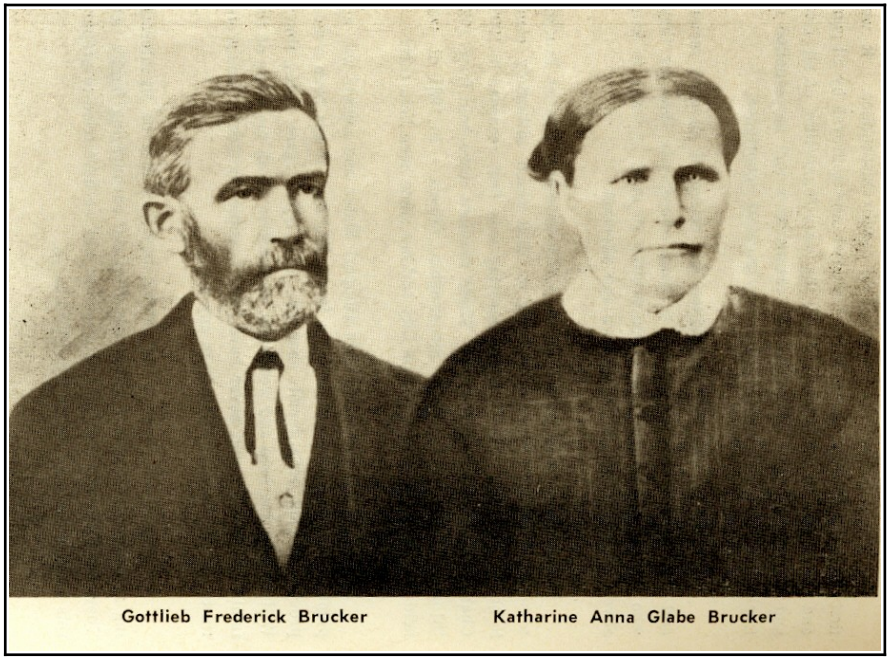
Post Publication Correction

After this story was published, a descendant contacted me and reported that I had an error in the story about the double wedding in 1898 at the Gottlieb Brucker home in Cropsey.

I went back to the Pantagraph article I cited for the story and the article said John Brucker married Miss Mary Lang, and Emma Brucker married Ernest Lang.

The descendant said the Pantagraph article was written incorrectly in 1898. Using sources in Ancestry.com, it was verified the Pantagraph made an error back in 1898.

John Brucker actually married Annie Louise Lange, not Mary Lang as reported by the Pantagraph. This was substantiated by John Brucker's Pantagraph obituary from December 18, 1961.



Gottlieb Frederick Brucker Katharine Anna Glabe Brucker

CHAPTER 43

History of the Steidinger Family

The most predominant family surname in the Fairbury area is Steidinger. According to Graceland Cemetery records, at least 65 family members are buried there.

The Steidinger family story began with the birth of Matthias Steidinger in 1797 in Germany. In 1819, Matthias Steidinger married Miss Susanne Weisser. Both Matthias and Susanne were 22 years of age when they married in Baden, Germany. Matthias and Susanne Steidinger had nine children. These children were born between 1820 and 1838 in Germany.

Three of Matthias' and Susanne Steidinger's sons decided to emigrate from Germany to the Fairbury area.

John George Steidinger (1825-1906) was one of Matthias and Susanne Steidinger's three sons who emigrated from Germany to Fairbury. John G. Steidinger was born in Baden, Germany, in 1825. He married Miss Anna Mary Yackley in 1844 in Germany. John was 19, and Anna was 17 years of age when they married. They had 16 children in Germany.

In 1875, the John G. Steidinger family decided to emigrate from Germany to the Fairbury area. The two parents and 11 of their children traveled across the Atlantic Ocean on a ship named the Amerique. In that era, the trip usually took seven to nine weeks. On the ship's manifest, George gave his age as 50, and his wife Anna gave her age as 48. Their 13 children ranged in age from seven to twenty-six. John listed his occupation as a farmer.

As listed on the 1875 ship's manifest, the children of John and Anna Steidinger included Christian, Ursula, Salomie, Elise, Marie, Mathias, Jacogues, Martin, Alexander, Anne, and Bartolome Steidinger.

John G. Steidinger purchased a farm in Avoca Township, north of Fairbury. John lived on this farm until his wife died in 1902. Anna was 72

years of age when she died. John G. Steidinger died in 1906 at the age of 81. John and his wife Anna were buried in Graceland Cemetery.

Another son of Matthias and Susanne Steidinger, who chose to emigrate to the Fairbury area, was Andreas "Andrew" Steidinger. He was born in Baden, Germany, in 1831. Andrew Steidinger married Miss Maria "Mary" Agatha Heinsman in Germany in 1853. Andrew and Mary were both 21 years of age when they married. They had eight children in Germany. Their children's names were Gottlieb, Andreas "Andrew," Mathais "Mathew," Johann "John" George, Maria Agatha "Mary," Bartholomaus Ernest "Barthol," Christian, and Jons Albert "John" Steidinger.

The Andrew Steidinger family decided to emigrate from Germany to the Fairbury area in 1885. Andrew decided to come to America ten years after his brother John G. Steidinger came to the Fairbury area. Andrew and his wife Mary were both 54 years of age when they made the trip across the Atlantic Ocean to America. All of the seven living children of Andrew and Mary Steidinger accompanied their parents in emigrating to the Fairbury area.

A third son of Matthias and Susanne Steidinger, who chose to emigrate to the Fairbury area, was Mathias Steidinger (1829-1882). Mathias married Miss Brigitta Haas in Germany in 1854. Mathias was 24, and Brigitta was 21 years of age when they married. They had three children, with one son who died at just one-year-old.

Unfortunately, Brigitta died in Germany in 1858 at the age of 25. Mathias and his two sons continued to live in Germany after the death of Brigitta. At some point, Mathias Steidinger emigrated from Germany to the Fairbury area. His two sons remained in Germany for the rest of their lives. Mathias Steidinger was buried in Graceland Cemetery when he died in 1882 at the age of 52.

Benjamin Nussbaum wrote two pamphlets about the history of the Apostolic Church. In 1973, he wrote his South Side history, and in 1975, he wrote his North Side History. In his 1973 pamphlet, Nussbaum recounted the North Side church was the oldest of the two rural churches by several years. Rudolph Leuthold was the Elder for the North Side church. In 1875, the South Side church was built. John G. Steidinger was

awarded the Eldership of the South Side church. The John G. Steidinger family emigrated from Germany to Fairbury in 1875.

A few notable members of the Steidinger family in Fairbury history include Martin Steidinger (1863-1957). He was one of the sons of John G. and Anna Steidinger. Martin became an Elder in the Apostolic Christian church for many years.

Another well-known member of the Steidinger family was Gottlieb Steidinger (1853-1933). He was the son of Andrew and Maria Steidinger. Gottlieb Steidinger ran a blacksmith shop in Fairbury for many years.

Between 1890 and 1892, Joseph G. Swing and Alexander Steidinger (1865-1960) were in business together. They ran a hardware and farm implement store known as Swing & Steidinger on the south side of Locust Street between Second and Third Streets. Alexander Steidinger was another son of John George Steidinger and Anna Mary Yackley. The old building advertising sign on the front of the Swing & Steidinger building was repainted in 2017.

The Steidinger family has played a critical role in the history of Fairbury for almost 150 years. They played an essential role in the early Apostolic Christian church, and family members have owned and operated many businesses over the years.

Three sons of Matthias Steidinger (1797-1880) and Susanne Weisser (1797-1862) who emigrated from Germany to Fairbury

- John George Steidinger (1825-1906) and Anna Mary Yackley (1827-1902).
- Emigrated in 1875
- 11 Children emigrated

- Andreas "Andrew" Steidinger (1831-1919) and Maria "Mary" Agatha Heinsman (1831-1913).
- Emigrated in 1885
- 7 Children emigrated

- Mathias Steidinger (1829-1882).
- Emigrated by himself.
- No children emigrated

CHAPTER 44

Fairbury's Longest-Serving Minister

Rev. Charles S. Davies was the longest-serving known minister in the history of Fairbury and served as the Presbyterian Minister for 45 years.

The family story of Rev. C. S. Davies began with the birth of David Davies in 1789 in Cardiganshire, Wales. He was the son of Even Davies (1759-1843) and his wife, Elizabeth Davies. Evan Davies was an elder in the church in Wales. Three of the sons of Even and Elizabeth Davies became ministers. These sons included Rev. Samuel Davies, Rev. Jenkin Davies, and Rev. David Davis (1789-1861).

Rev. David Davies began preaching at the Pensarn church in Wales in 1814. In 1824, Rev. David Davis married Mary Jenkins in Wales. He was 35, and she was 24 when they married.

One of David and Mary Davies' sons was Even Llewellyn Davies. He was born in Cardiganshire, Wales, in 1827. In 1830, Rev. David Davies built a new house on a part of the Tirgwyn Estate and they called their home Brynawen. Rev. David Davies was 41 when they constructed the house.

In 1837, Rev. David and Mary Davies emigrated from Wales to Jackson County, Ohio. David preached to the Welsh settlers. One of his preaching stations was near his home, which stood on the old turnpike road between Gallipolis and Chillicothe, ten miles east of Jackson Court House. A second preaching station was seven miles away at the house of Isaac Evans in Gallia County. These congregations were soon organized into churches, with houses of worship and flourishing Sunday schools. In 1840, Rev. David Davies was ordained to the ministry.

Around 1840, the Underground Railroad was created. The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States during the early to mid-19th century. Enslaved African Americans used it primarily to escape into free states and from there to Canada. The network, mainly the work of free African Americans, was assisted by abolitionists and others sympathetic to the cause of the

escapees. The enslaved people who risked capture and those who aided them are also collectively referred to as the passengers and conductors of the "Underground Railroad."

Rev. David Davies was a strong Abolitionist who wanted to fight against slavery. Rev. David Davies became a member of the Underground Railroad in Ohio.

In 1856, Rev. David Davies moved from Ohio to Blue Earth County in Minnesota. He preached there until he died on April 17, 1861, at the age of 71.

In 1860, Rev. Even L. Davies, son of Rev. David Davis, married Abigail J. Abbie in Jackson County, Ohio. He was 33, and she was 19 when they married. They had three children. He was a Presbyterian Minister. The three children of Even and Abigail Davies were Llewellyn James Davies (1865-1950), Mary Anna Davies (1867-1935), Charles Stanley Davies (1872-1956), and Abigail J. Davies (1873-1933)

Llewellyn J. Davies was educated at Lake Forest Academy and the Hartford and McCormick Theological Seminaries. He married Helen Goodsill in 1892, and he and his bride sailed to China. They had no children. Both of them lived in China until they died.

Mary Anna Davies and Abigaril J. Davies never married.

Charles S. Davies, like his brother, attended Lake Forest Academy and then the McCormick Theological Seminaries. Upon graduation, he became the minister at the Fairbury Presbyterian Church in 1896.

The Fairbury Presbyterian Church was in bad shape at the time, and the congregation was discouraged and seriously considering dissolution. Within a few months, the church grew due to the originality and energy of Rev. Davies. He became very active in community affairs.

In his early years at Fairbury, Rev. Davies was interested in promoting athletics for boys and young men. These boys and men later became active supporters of the church.

The Blade reported that Rev. Davies was of Welsh descent. Rev. Davies often demonstrated the Welsh people's love of music by leaving the pulpit and joining the choir in singing hymns.

The congregation held many celebration events on the 35th anniversary of Rev. Davies being the Presbyterian Church Minister in 1931. The congregation hoped Rev. Davies would continue his service for many more years.

After 45 years of serving as the minister, Rev. Davies retired in 1941 to move to Philadelphia to care for a sick sister. Rev. Davies moved back to Fairbury in 1948.

Near the end of his life, Rev. Davies moved to the Ward nursing home in Fairbury. One cold January day in 1956, he was found lying on the ground in the vacant lot across the street from the Nursing home. He was rushed to the Fairbury Hospital but was pronounced dead. A coroner's inquest found he had died from a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 84.

A large funeral was held at the Presbyterian Church. The pallbearers were: Robert Nussbaum, William Wharton, Perry Burroughs, Marvin Reaney, William Gittinger, and Howard Fugate. Honorary pallbearers were J. K. Huette, A. J. Kilgus, Clair Barnes, Stanley Barnes, Swift Dawson, William Fugate, Wallace Ramseyer, C. R. Voris, Jerry Denbo, Floyd McGillen, and Harold Scheld. Rev. Davies was buried in Graceland Cemetery.

Rev. Charles S. Davies was the longest-serving known minister in the history of Fairbury at 45 years. He conducted hundreds of weddings and funerals in Fairbury. He revived a failing church and made it a vital institution for over four decades.

Charles Stanley Davies (1872-1956) served as the minister for the Fairbury Presbyterian Church for 45 years.

CHAPTER 45

Early Settlers and the Black Hawk War

The five-month Black Hawk War broke out shortly after the first settlers arrived in the Fairbury area. Most early settlers decided to go east to Indiana for a few months until the war ended. This story began with the Kickapoo tribe living about four miles south of Fairbury from 1828 to 1830. There were about 650 members of the Kickapoo tribe living in 97 wigwams with a council house.

Two important Native American foot trails met where the Kickapoo village was located south of Fairbury. The Sauk and Kickapoo trail ran southeast from Ottawa to Danville. South of Fairbury, the Kickapoo trail branched off from the main trail and ran east to Indiana.

In 1830, the Kickapoo tribe moved ten miles east to Oliver's Grove. The tribe likely moved east so the village would remain on the Kickapoo trail to Indiana.

Just as the Kickapoo moved from Fairbury to Oliver's Grove, Valentine Darnall settled south of Fairbury. The Darnall family had several interactions with the Kickapoo tribe. When they first arrived, the Kickapoo gave them some beans they had cultivated. These beans prevented the Darnall family from starving during the terrible winter of 1830-1831. The following autumn, the Kickapoo asked Darnall if they could leave their supply of maple sugar with him until the following spring. Darnall fulfilled their request and returned the maple sugar to the Kickapoo the following spring. Years later, Darnall was asked if he was tempted to eat some Kickapoo's maple sugar. Darnall admitted he was mightily tempted to eat some of the sugar but stopped cold when he discovered it was thick with dog hairs.

The story was often recited that Mrs. Darnall once asked an old Chief if he and his tribe members would kill them if an uprising should occur. The old Chief is said to have replied, "Oh yes, but we kill them quickly," meaning that they would not be tortured.

In early 1832, the Franklin Oliver family stopped for the night about three miles south of present-day Chatsworth. They were surprised to find they had chosen to camp in the middle of a Kickapoo village. Oliver did not usually smoke tobacco, but he later recounted that he made a wise decision to smoke a pipe with the Kickapoo Chief.

A short time later, in 1832, the William McDowell family arrived and settled on the South Branch of the Vermilion River about three miles north of Fairbury. The McDowells proceeded to erect their cabin at once. They brought with them a few panes of glass for a window. The boards that furnished the material for their house's door and window casing were purchased from the Kickapoo tribe and were brought from Oliver's Grove with an ox team. The Kickapoo traded the hewn wood for a small supply of ammunition. Also in 1832, the William Popejoy family arrived and settled on Indian Creek in Avoca Township.

In April of 1932, the Black Hawk War started. This war was a conflict between the United States and Native Americans led by Black Hawk, a Sauk leader. The fighting erupted after Black Hawk and Sauks, Meskwakis (Fox), and Kickapoos crossed the Mississippi River into Illinois from Iowa. Black Hawk's motives were ambiguous, but it is believed he was hoping to reclaim land sold to the United States in the disputed 1804 Treaty of St. Louis.

U.S. officials were convinced that the Native Americans were hostile, and they mobilized a frontier militia and opened fire on a delegation from the Native Americans on May 14, 1832. Black Hawk responded by successfully attacking the militia at the Battle of Stillman's Run. He led his band to a secure location in what is now southern Wisconsin and was pursued by U.S. forces. Meanwhile, other Native Americans conducted raids against forts and colonies that had no militia to protect them.

The early settlers of the Fairbury area grew very nervous about being attacked as part of the Black Hawk War. In May of 1832, Franklin Oliver met with the Kickapoo tribe. After this meeting, Oliver had dinner at the William McDowell cabin. Oliver reported that the Kickapoo tribe had recommended that the early settlers abandon their home or erect fortifications. These early settlers only owned two rifles and had very little ammunition.

On May 27, all the white men in the settlement held a council. This council decided the best course of action was temporarily moving their families to Indiana until the war ended. On May 29, thirty-one of the early settlers loaded their seven families onto six wagons and left for Indiana.

Franklin Oliver got along very well with the Kickapoo and decided to remain in his cabin in the Kickapoo village south of Chatsworth. The Darnall and Spence families chose to stay in Mackinaw temporarily.

On the second day of the march of the 31 settlers to Indiana, a panic was created at their campsite. A couple of Native Americans had been seen on a ridge overlooking the camp, and then they disappeared into the tall grass. The women and children began to cry, and some of the men were severely frightened. They assumed the tribe members were scouts sent by Chief Black Hawk. William McDowell was not scared and, as he held his frying pan over the fire, stated that he did not propose to be scalped on an empty stomach. However, it was soon ascertained that the Indians were two friendly Kickapoos who had come to bid their white friends farewell.

According to Wikipedia, Abraham Lincoln served as a volunteer in the Illinois Militia from April 21, 1832, to July 10, 1832, during the Black Hawk War. Lincoln never saw combat during his tour but was elected captain of his first company. He was also present in the aftermath of two of the war's battles, where he helped to bury the militia dead.

The Black Hawk War ended in September of 1832 when Black Hawk surrendered. The 31 early settlers in Indiana moved back to their homes north of Fairbury. The Darnalls and Spences in Mackinaw also returned to their homes south of Fairbury. Shortly after the Black Hawk War ended, the Kickapoos were forced to leave the state of Illinois. The tribe split up and eventually settled on reservations in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico. Although the early settlers in the Fairbury area lived close to a village of 650 Kickapoo, no hostilities occurred between the early settlers and the Native Americans.

Black Hawk, the Sauk war chief and namesake of the Black Hawk War in 1832.

CHAPTER 46

Underground Railroad in Livingston County

The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States during the early to mid-19th century. Enslaved African Americans used it primarily to escape into free states and from there to Canada. The network, mainly the work of free African Americans, was assisted by abolitionists and others sympathetic to the cause of the escapees. The enslaved people who risked capture and those who aided them are also collectively referred to as the passengers and conductors of the "Underground Railroad."

The Underground Railroad began in about 1840. It ran north and grew steadily until President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free." One estimate suggests that, by 1850, approximately 100,000 enslaved people had escaped to freedom via the network.

One of the best references on the Underground Railroad was written by Professor Wilbur H. Siebert in 1898. The title of the book was ***The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom***. In this book, Professor Siebert created a map of the eastern United States showing all the known routes on the Underground Railroad. This map reveals that most of the routes on the Underground Railroad were in Ohio. Enslaved people in the Deep South traveled up through Kentucky and West Virginia into Ohio and then on to Canada for freedom.

Most of the Underground Railroad routes in Illinois were in the western half of Illinois and followed the Mississippi River. There was only one major route in east-central Illinois, many miles east of Livingston County.

The first settler family in Livingston County was Valentine Darnall in 1830. Livingston County was not formed until 1837. Livingston County was one of the last counties in Illinois to be settled. The land was swampy, and no railroads existed to ship agricultural supplies or products. In 1850,

Congress passed a new Script Act law, which gave free land to primarily veterans of the War of 1812. This new law created a rush of settlers into Livingston County between 1853 and 1860. By 1860, all the farmland in the county was claimed by settlers.

Because there were almost no farmers living in Livingston County between 1830 and 1853, it is not surprising there were no major Underground Railroad routes in the county. Alma Lewis James was a Fairbury Historian who wrote the book ***Stuffed Clubs & Antimaccassars***. In her book, she claimed there was an underground railroad route from Strawn to Odell. The path included a stop-over at a cabin on the Fugate farm northeast of Fairbury on the Vermilion River. Alma reported there was one enslaved person known to be buried by the river bank. She said no other information about this route was available because all the activities were secret and done at night. Unfortunately, Alma cited no reference material sources for her story.

Dr. C. B. Ostrander was one of the first doctors in Livingston County. He lived between Fairbury and McDowell. The 1888 Livingston County history book recounts that Dr. Ostrander was also a staunch Abolitionist. One day, he came into Fairbury and found a fugitive slave chained to the floor of a two-story building. This fugitive slave was going to be returned to his master in Virginia. The Doctor cut the shackles from the fugitive using a crowbar, sledgehammer, and chisel. He loaded the fugitive into a horse-drawn buggy and delivered him to Dr. C. V. Dyer in Chicago. Ostrander also gave the fugitive $10 in cash. The fugitive was placed on Captain Blake's steamer "Illinois." The steamer transported him to freedom in Maiden, Canada.

The 1878 Livingston County history book contains a lot of information about several men in Pontiac who were strong Abolitionists and participated in the Underground Railroad route that ran from Eppards Point Township west of Fairbury to Pontiac and then on to Ottawa. These men included Owen Lovejoy, James H. Collins, Ichabod Codling, Chauncey Cook, Otis Richardson, John Hossack, William B. Fyfe, William Strawn, Otis Whaley, George and Xenophon Richards, Moses Rumery, C. P. Pagent, and Dr. H. H. Hinman.

One of the Abolitionist leaders in the Pontiac area was William B. Fyfe (1822-1910). He was born and raised in Scotland. He came to Canada in 1844 and worked in the mercantile business. In 1849, he moved to Ottawa, Illinois. While in Ottawa, he was a Conductor and operated a safe house "Depot" for the Underground Railroad. Mr. Fyfe became a lawyer.

In 1856, Mr. Fyfe moved to Livingston County and set up a store in New Michigan for two years. New Michigan was north of Pontiac. The new railroads did not go through New Michigan, so it became a ghost town. Mr. Fyfe became a farmer. In 1862, he moved to Pontiac and entered the law firm of E. A. Harding. That same year, he enlisted in the Union Army and fought in the Civil War.

Mr. Fyfe's experience as a conductor and depot operator in Ottawa likely led to the formation of an underground railroad line originating west of Fairbury at the Otis Richardson Farm. The line ran north to Pontiac and then to Ottawa in LaSalle County.

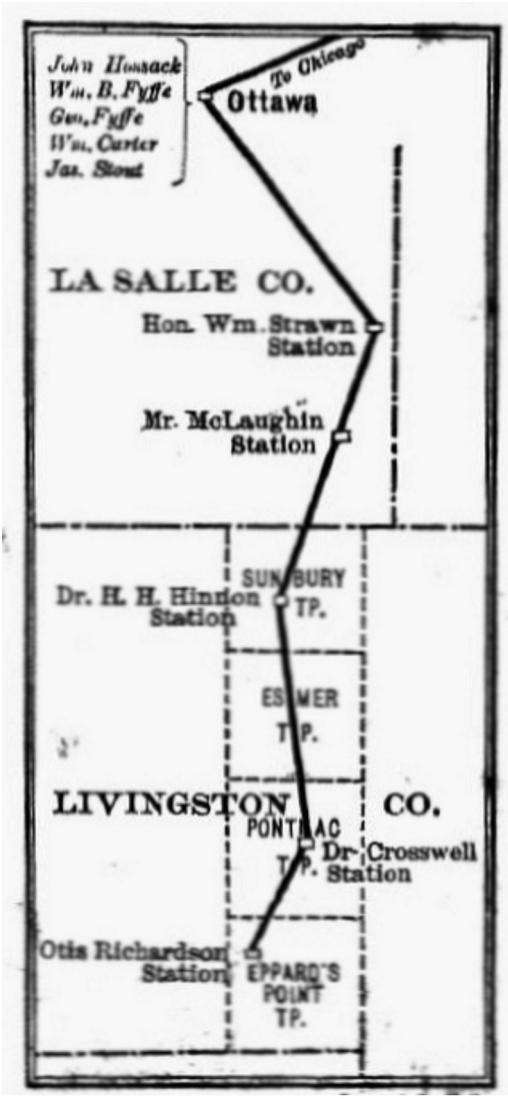
For his 1898 book on the Underground Railroad, Professor Siebert obtained a hand-drawn map of the stretch of the Underground Railroad from west of Fairbury up to Ottawa from William B. Fyfe. Mr. Fyfe died in 1910, so he likely provided the map to Professor Siebert for his 1898 book.

Unfortunately, Mr. Fyfe's map extends only as far south as Otis Richardson's farm. South of Otis Richardson's farm would mark the end of Livingston County and the start of McLean County.

The 1879 McLean County history book references the Underground Railroad having a station in Mount Hope Township. This township is southwest of Bloomington. Mr. John Moss had a secret compartment in his house for hiding slave fugitives. Mr. Moss or one of his friends would guide the fugitives to one of two destinations. The first destination was Aunt Polly's Mahan's station at Lexington. If the weather was excellent, the more extended alternative destination was the Abolitionists in New Michigan, operated by Charles Pagent and his supporters in Livingston County.

The issue of whether or not to return fugitive enslaved people to their owners in the South in the 1840 to 1863 era did have an impact on Fairbury and Livingston County citizens. A branch of the Underground Railroad running from west of Fairbury and through Pontiac on to Ottawa did help many fugitive enslaved people obtain their freedom in Canada.

Underground Railroad routes in Central Illinois from 1898 Professor Siebert book.



Underground Railroad route from west of Fairbury, through Pontiac, and on to Ottawa.

CHAPTER 47

Irish Immigrant Survived Dreaded Andersonville Prison in Civil War

Wallace R. Hemphill was an Irish immigrant who served in the Union Army and survived being a POW at the dreaded Andersonville prison in Georgia. After the Civil War, Wallace became a very successful farmer about nine miles south of Fairbury. One of his sons, Wallace R. Hemphill Jr., became a druggist in Fairbury.

Wallace R. Hemphill was born in 1842 in County Tyrone in Northern Ireland. For centuries, there has been conflict in Northern Ireland between predominantly Catholic Ireland and mainly Protestant England.

The Hemphill family in Northern Ireland was Protestant, and they were Orangemen. The Orange Order was founded by Ulster Protestants in County Armagh in 1795. The Orangemen Order was founded during the Protestant–Catholic sectarian conflict. The Orangemen were a fraternity sworn to maintain the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland.

Family lore recounts that Mary Hemphill brought her younger brother, Wallace R. Hemphill, to America to avoid religious persecution. Mary and her brother Wallace R. Hemphill came to America in 1854 when he was about 12 years old. They first settled in New Jersey. Around 1856, Mary Hemphill married Marion Johnson, and they moved to O'Neill, Nebraska. In the 1860 U.S. Census, Wallace R. Hemphill was a 20-year-old laborer who lived with the Shoemaker family in Gloucester County, New Jersey.

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861, when Confederate forces fired upon Fort Sumter, South Carolina. The Third Regiment of the New Jersey Volunteer Infantry was raised in May of 1861. Men from nearly every county in the state enlisted, and on June 28, with a compliment of 1,051 men, the Regiment left Camp Olden, Trenton, to start fighting the war. It was one of the regiments that comprised what was known as the "First New Jersey Brigade." It participated in every significant action with the Army of the Potomac until June of 1864 when it was mustered out of

service. Men who reenlisted were transferred to the 15th Regiment and saw service until the end of the war.

Nineteen-year-old Wallace R. Hemphill enlisted in the 3rd Regiment of the New Jersey Volunteer Infantry in Company A as a Private on April 19, 1861. He enlisted in Gloucester County, New Jersey. The Prison of War Records state that he was captured at Mechanicsville, Virginia, on May 30, 1864, was confederated at Richmond, Virginia, on May 31, 1864, and then was sent to the prison at Andersonville, Georgia. Mr. Hemphill was in the Andersonville Prison from June 8, 1864, to November 19, 1864.

Andersonville had a death rate of 29%, the highest of any Union or Confederate prison. There were three primary reasons for the high death rate among prisoners at Andersonville. The most significant factor was that prisoner exchanges almost stopped after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. After the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, many African Americans joined the Union Army. The Confederacy then refused to include black troops in military prisoner exchanges. President Lincoln ordered the stoppage of all prisoner exchanges with the Confederacy. The number of prisoners dramatically swelled after the prisoner swaps stopped. Andersonville prison was never designed to handle 30,000 prisoners.

The second major factor that made Andersonville the deadliest prisoner camp was the prisoners' lack of food. During the latter half of the Civil War, the South lacked food for their fighting soldiers. Not enough food was left to feed the Union prisoners held at Andersonville. The camp commander, Captain Henry Wirz, often asked for food and medicine for the prisoners. All of his requests were denied.

The number of prisoners at Andersonville swelled to four times the design capacity of the prison. A small creek ran through the Georgia camp. This little creek was used as a latrine by the prisoners. The stream was also their only drinking water supply. The water became contaminated, and thousands of men died of starvation and disease.

There is the legend of a little brook, a spring, which came out of the ground and was called Providence Spring and was accepted as evidence that the One Above had remembered the stockade and the people in it.

Wallace Hemphill told his children about that little spring of cool water, which still exists, coming from the ground during a heavy thunderstorm in August 1864. Mr. Hemphill, too, felt it was sent from God. The legend is that many sermons were spoken at this site, and many prisoners spoke of angels seen.

Mr. Hemphill received parole at Savannah, Georgia, on November 18, 1864. He reported at College Green Barracks, Maryland, on November 25, 1864. From November 26 to December 16, 1864, he was treated for scurvy at the Camp Parole, Maryland hospital. Upon being dismissed from the hospital, he received a furlough. He returned to camp on January 17, 1865, and to duty on January 20, 1865. On January 25, 1865, he was sent to Trenton, New Jersey, for muster out. He mustered out of the military on February 3, 1865. The Civil War ended on April 9, 1865, when General Robert E. Lee surrendered the last major Confederate army to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse.

After the end of the Civil War, Wallace R. Hemphill came to Illinois. He married Susan Hale on October 11, 1867, in Peoria County, by Justice of the Peace Allen S. Sweet. Wallace was 25, and Susan was 23 years of age when they married. They had nine children.

Many of the men who survived Andersonville Prison were plagued for the rest of their lives with illnesses that started with their interment at that prison. Wallace R. Hemphill continued to suffer after the Civil War ended. He was granted a pension on February 5, 1887, because he had contracted rheumatism from exposure in Andersonville Prison. Mr. Hemphill contracted scurvy in his mouth and legs from exposure. He was considered one-half disabled by the U.S. Government. Mr. Hemphill was just 45 years old when he was classified as one-half disabled.

Wallace R. Hemphill died in 1898 when he was 56 years of age. His obituary recounted that he was a prominent and well-to-do farmer who died at home after a lingering illness. Mr. Hemphill was a member of the I. O. O. F. lodge at Fairbury. He was buried in Cooper Cemetery, about seven miles southwest of Fairbury.

On May 27, 1898, the Blade published an article announcing the Memorial Day ceremonies upcoming on May 30th in Fairbury. The report noted the

names of 67 deceased veterans would be read at Graceland Cemetery. The 66th man on this list was Wallace R. Hemphill, who served in the 3rd Regiment of the New Jersey Volunteer Infantry.

Wallace R. Hemphill was an Irish immigrant who enlisted to fight for the Union just a few years after he arrived in America. He fought in many battles and was captured and sent to the dreaded Andersonville Prison. Mr. Hemphill survived Andersonville Prison and became a prosperous farmer with a wife and nine children. Unfortunately, the hardships he faced at Andersonville caused him to die prematurely at the age of 56.

Wallace R. Hemphill (1842-1898).

Gravestone for Wallace R. Hemphill in Cooper Cemetery southwest of Fairbury.

CHAPTER 48

History Was Made at Walnut and Fourth Streets

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. The first home was built in late 1857 by John Coomer. The first commercial building was also built in 1857 at the southwest corner of Walnut and Fourth Streets.

The first commercial building was used as a store by William Mitchell. In 1868, an addition was made, and it was called the Home House Hotel. In 1872, a stock company put on another significant addition. The name was changed to the Fairbury House, and Wallace Amsbary and S. S. Rogers operated the hotel. Mr. Amsbary relinquished his interest, and Mr. Rogers ran the hotel until 1887.

Mr. Rogers sold the hotel to James Turner, who retained ownership for five years. In 1893, Fred Thomas purchased the property and thoroughly remodeled the hotel. He renamed it Thomas House and operated it until 1904. Then, J. P. Haughn leased and managed the hotel. When the passenger trains stopped in Fairbury to discharge their travelers, they used to run the half block from the depot to the Thomas House to be confident they had a reservation.

May 20, 1907, was a cold day. Twenty-five registered guests were staying at the Thomas House. Mr. Haughn, the proprietor, sent Clem Wright to the basement to start a fire. Clem put in a quantity of waste paper in the furnace and ignited it. The furnace flue pipe caught fire close to the roof. At one PM, smoke was observed, and the city fire alarm was sounded. When the fire department arrived, it was too late to save the hotel. Many onlookers walked or rode bicycles to the railroad tracks to watch the fire to the south.

After the Thomas House burned down, Fairbury had only one hotel, the Archer House on Locust Street. The Archer house was located just west of

Walton's building on Locust Street. The Fairbury Improvement Group repainted the exterior building name sign in May 2018.

In 1911, a new hotel was built at the southwest corner of Locust and Second Streets. This modern hotel was initially called the Illinois Hotel. This building was purchased by Honegger's in 1946. The hotel was demolished in 1996. Today, this is the location of the new Fairbury City Hall.

Also, in 1907, a six-week-long revival meeting was held in Fairbury. It was conducted by evangelist Billy Sunday. Assisting Rev. Billy Sunday was Rev. Honeywell. Although the 1907 revival meetings were very popular, interest in revival meetings waned in subsequent years.

In 1913, revival meetings held by evangelists became popular again. A group of Fairbury churches requested that Reverend Honeywell return to Fairbury and put on a five-week series of revival meetings in early 1914. Dr. Honeywell insisted that a tabernacle building be provided for the revival meetings.

Fairbury had two opera houses in 1913 that could have been used for the revival meetings. One opera house was at the northwest corner of Locust and Fifth Streets. The other opera house was at the southeast corner of Maple and Third Streets.

The churches sponsoring the revival meetings decided to quickly erect a temporary building on the vacant lots where the Thomas House had been located. Construction started in late 1913, and the building was completed before the February 1914 revival meetings began. The Fairbury Tabernacle was large enough to hold the audience plus 200 choir members. The choir was composed of members from the Fairbury area churches. The Fairbury Tabernacle also had sawdust in the aisles.

On February 13, 1914, the Honeywell party arrived in Fairbury. The party came from Ashley, Ohio, and included Professor H. C. Clase, Mrs. Clase, and Miss Lamont. Professor Clase met with the large choir that evening to plan the revival meetings.

The first revival meetings were extremely popular. Attendees particularly enjoyed the music provided by the large choir comprised of Fairbury citizens. The sessions were so popular that the Third Street Opera House discontinued operations until the revival meetings had concluded. The Fairbury Art Club also stopped meetings during the revivals.

Rev. Honeywell was not only a famous evangelist, but he was also a good promoter. To gather more attendees to his revivals, he had small boys, each dressed to represent various nations. In a parade, each boy carried a placard advertising the revival events.

One old photograph of the Fairbury, Illinois, tabernacle building still survives. This photo illustrates the building design was temporary. After 1914, there is no further mention of the Fairbury Tabernacle building.

1961, the new Medical Arts Building was built on the lots where the Thomas House and Fairbury Tabernacle once stood. The Blade noted the Medical Arts Building was of fireproof construction compared to the Thomas House, which burned down in 1907. The Medical Arts Building is now called Carle Fairbury —A Department of Carle Bromenn Medical Center at 115 East Walnut Street.

The southwest corner of Walnut and Fourth Streets has seen a lot of Fairbury history. The first commercial store in Fairbury was built there in 1857. The building was modified in subsequent years, and the Home House, the Fairbury House, and the Thomas House hotels occupied that site. The old building was destroyed in a spectacular fire in 1907. After the building lots sat vacant for six years after the big fire, a temporary structure, the Fairbury Tabernacle, was erected for Rev. Honeywell's evangelistic meetings in 1914. In 1961, the Medical Arts Building was constructed on that site. The clinic is now named Carle Fairbury.

1914 photograph of the Tabernacle building at the southwest corner of 4th and Walnut Streets.

CHAPTER 49

Fairbury Native Wrote Book on Early Fairbury Life

Until recently, the only known historical source that explains what life was like in Fairbury in the 1870 to 1900 period was the Stuffed Club & Antimacassars book by Alma Lewis James (1899-1979). Alma's most likely source for describing early life in Fairbury was her mother, Ella Beach Lewis (1862-1939).

Alma devoted several chapters in her book to describing the daily life of a family living in early Fairbury. She decided only to cover the 1857 to 1900 period in Fairbury because she thought the introduction of automobiles around 1905 changed life too dramatically.

Another book by a Fairbury native was recently discovered. Blanche Conner was born in Fairbury in 1872. She grew up in Fairbury from her birth in 1872 until about 1885, when her family moved to Kearney, Nebraska, for a few years. Her family then moved to Canton, Illinois. Blanche and two of her sisters moved to Chicago and found work there. Blanche became a bookkeeper in Chicago. Her employer asked her to move to their London, England, branch for at least one year to straighten out their books. Blanche took the job and enjoyed London for a little over one year. She moved back to Chicago and married Lucien Gray, an attorney she had met in Canton.

Lucien and Blanche Gray had two girls and one boy. They moved to the Los Angeles, California, area and lived the rest of their lives there. In the early 1950s, Blanche's grandchildren loved hearing about life in Fairbury and Los Angeles. In 1953, Blanche Gray wrote a book titled ***Ruffled Petticoat Days***. This book focused on her life experiences when they moved to Los Angeles. Blanche was 81 years old when she published her first book.

This first book was so popular that she wrote a second book in 1957 titled ***On The Tips of Her Toes***. The first one-third of this book focuses on what

her life was like growing up in Fairbury in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Unfortunately, Blanche died in Los Angeles in 1958 at age 85.

Blanche's father was Milo M. Conner (1845-1937). He served as a Private from Indiana for the Union in the Civil War. In Fairbury, Milo worked as a laborer and carpenter. According to the Blade, Milo Conner was one of the original members of the Fairbury Neptune Fire Company in 1873.

Blanche's mother was Lualtha A. Oakes (1850-1890). Milo and Lualtha Conner had five daughters. Lualtha was a homemaker, and their family lived on Walnut Street.

In her second book, Blanche recounted that as a young girl in Fairbury, she had to pump and carry all the water they needed into their house. She also brought in wood and coal for the stoves. Blanche had to fill their lamps with kerosene and periodically clean the chimneys. Blanche wrote in her 1957 book, "Now we turn on a faucet for water both upstairs and downstairs, push a button for heat from our gas furnaces and another button for our electric lights all over the house."

Blanche also remembered that she and her four sisters used to sew carpet rags to make big balls and, eventually, carpets. She remembered that one evening, while they were sewing the long strips, their dog was lying under a table in the same room. The dog got up and knocked over the table with the burning kerosene lamp on top of the table. Blanche thought the whole house would burn down, but her mother managed to extinguish the fire.

Another memory Blanche had of living in Fairbury was that she really liked eating the big brown lumps of sugar. On one occasion, she moved a chair over by the cabinet with the brown sugar container. Blanche stood "on the tips of her toes" on the chair to try to reach the brown sugar container. She fell off the chair, and before she knew it, she was on the floor with sugar all over her. She used this experience as the title of her second book.

Blanche remembered one day, she was walking home from school, and a boy started to chase her. Blanche ran as fast as she could and tried to climb over a fence. The boy caught her and kissed her. Blanche thought she was ruined for life and began to cry. The boy first called her a crybaby, but he

got a lovely, clean handkerchief and wiped her tears away. The boy told Blanche that he had kissed his sisters and she was just like one of them. The boy acted in a manlike fashion and straightened it all out. Blanche and the boy walked to her house, and they got to playing and forgot all about the kissing.

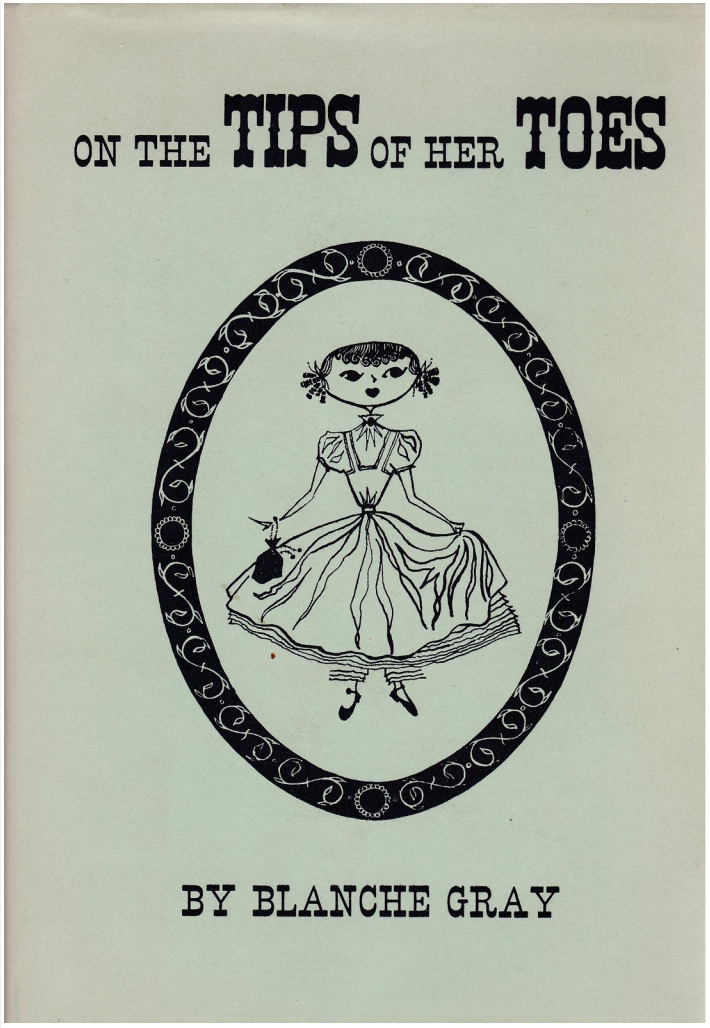
One of the year's most significant events in Fairbury was when the circus came to town. Blanche and her sisters would save their pennies for admission to see the circus. Blanche's father would take his daughters to see the circus, and he had as much fun as the girls did.

Blanche reported that all the houses in Fairbury had big yards. Each family had horses and at least one cow for milk. Most families also had chickens. Blanche loved to hold the little fluffy baby chicks in her hands. Blanche and her sisters learned to care for and feed all the animals.

Most houses also had some fruit trees. During the fruit harvesting season, Blanche helped with canning, preserving, and making jelly. The winters in Fairbury were cold and long. Vegetables and fruits were stored in a cellar and eaten during the long winters.

Blanche had fond memories of living in Fairbury. In her book, she said, "In those days we lived very simply, but it seemed to me a most gracious life, learning to do all those necessary things which one could never forget, living close to all our friends, visiting back and forth; and I think of the good homemade bread and cinnamon rolls and how we did eat them with our homemade butter and good fresh milk—a really wonderful childhood to look back upon and to have had the privilege of enjoying at that time."

Although Alma Lewis James did a great job explaining what early life was like in Fairbury in her Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars book, Blanche Gray gives us a slightly different perspective about her experience of growing up in Fairbury.



Cover of Blanche's second book in which she describes what life was like growing up in Fairbury in the 1870s and 1880s.

CHAPTER 50

Tomatoes Grown in the 1960s in Fairbury

By the 1950s, horses had been replaced by internal combustion engine-powered tractors on Fairbury area farms. For various reasons, farmers standardized by only growing corn and soybeans on their farms.

Many Fairbury area farmers were surprised when they read the May 14, 1964, issue of the Fairbury Blade newspaper. In this edition, the Blade reported that 40 acres of tomatoes would be grown on the Jim Goold farm four miles northwest of Fairbury.

The Blade reporter asked Jim Goold why he turned to raising tomatoes when he had an excellent five-year corn average of 114 bushels per acre. "Everybody talks about our corn surplus," says Jim, "so I decided that the land might as well produce something that is needed."

Historically, Campbell Soup had three plants in Chicago. Each year, they contracted with nearby farmers to grow the tomatoes needed by the factories. As Chicago continued to expand, many of these farms were converted to residential or commercial real estate. Campbell Soup had to look further south for farmland to grow their tomatoes.

In January 1964, Campbell Soup guaranteed him a market to sell his tomatoes, but the other headaches were Goold's. Goold had to pay all the bills for the labor, fertilizer, planting, insecticide fungicide spraying, and trucking. Of course, Campbell assisted by finding labor, plants, and trucks if necessary.

In May of 1964, a crew of nine people planted 220,000 tomato plants on Jim Goold's 40-acre patch. They put 5,500 tomato plants per acre 16 inches apart and in rows 66 inches wide.

Jim rented a unique planter to do the job. Helpers were Lois Chapman, Karen Lake, Tom Hudson, Mary Bagley, Margaret Karr, Mildred Skrobonak, Evelyn and Everett Ruff. Jack Taylor and Goold acted as tractor operators.

Three different varieties were planted, one a hybrid. The hybrid plant was developed in the United States but hand-pollinated in Japan. The plants were started in Mississippi and Georgia and then moved to northern states for the mature product.

Other area tomato growers for Campbell soup that year were Roy Peterson, Colfax, John H. Miller, Dallas, and Carl Wendling, all of Chenoa, Donald Hassinger, Swygert, Herbert Zimmerman, Pontiac, Louis Bachman and Ben Wettstein, both of Gridley.

Almost an acre at the Goold farm was used for experimental purposes. A research doctor from Campbell Soup conducted the program. Several varieties were planted and nursed along. Goold used 120 pounds of phosphate and 75 pounds of nitrogen to the acre. He also applied 180 gallons of water to the acre when the tomatoes were planted.

In August 1964, Blade reporter Dale R. Albee did a follow-up article about Jim Goold's tomato harvesting operation. The tomato harvest started in August, and it took about eight weeks to harvest the 40 acres of tomatoes.

A crew of about 50 Mexican-Americans spent eight weeks at the Jim Goold farm. Thirty-five of the fifty people worked in the fields. Jim Goold provided living quarters for his workers by completely remodeling a metal shed. He put up partition walls and created eight huge rooms and a recreation area in the center. The building had a screened-in area with a TV. The screened-in room was used for visiting, dancing, or fiestas.

Outside toilets were erected, a bathhouse was built, and a laundry room was constructed. Jim Goold also provided all the furniture. Jim Goold told the Blade reporter he wanted to make the building pleasant enough that the workers would want to come back the following year.

The tomatoes were picked by hand and placed into crates called lugs. Each lug held about 32 pounds of tomatoes. The average worker could pick enough tomatoes to fill 225 to 250 lugs daily. Workers were paid by the lug.

The champion picker at the camp was a woman named Mela Aguilar. She picked about 275 lugs daily, or 8,800 pounds of tomatoes daily. No other worker could keep up with her.

Once harvest started, four semi-trucks were loaded with tomatoes each day and sent to one of Campbell Soup's Chicago processing plants. Each truck held 1,080 crates.

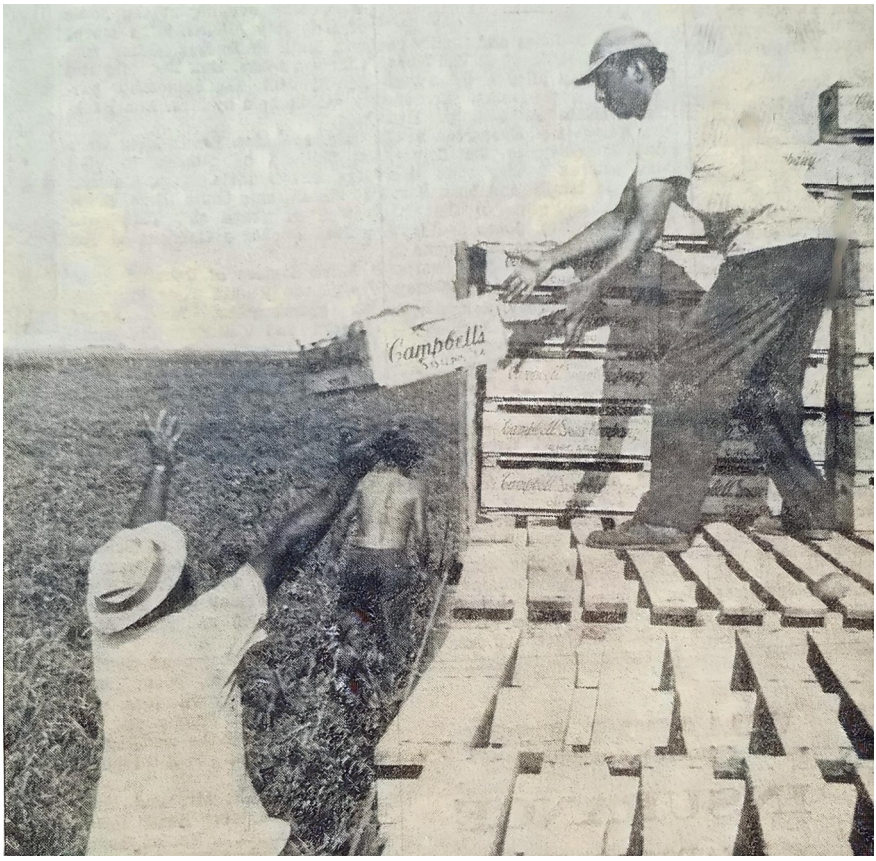
The supervisor of the Mexican-American workers was Lalo Chavez. He was a worker for eight years before taking over foremanship two years before. He had his crew at Princeton harvesting asparagus for the prior two months. Chavez had 68 workers there on 750 acres. He noted that a good picker can average 1,000 pounds of asparagus daily. Chavez was married and the father of six children.

During the winter months, the work crew journeyed back to their homes in Texas, where they harvested carrots and fruits.

The Blade reported observed the most demanding job of all is truck loading. Those men were paid extra. Crates of tomatoes were stacked at the end of the rows. These were then pitched onto a semi-trailer as it moved along. A man on the ground hoisted the 32-pound lug all the way from the ground and threw it to a man on the truck. Since lugs are stacked nine high on the truck, this amounted to a lot of throwing. The men took turns. One worker loaded half the truck

from the ground with the other worker up on the truck. Then, the two workers switched positions. They attained the unbelievable speed of loading 1,080 crates in 45 minutes.

Jim Goold continued raising tomatoes on his farm for several more years before he discontinued tomato farming. The Blade reported that all the parties involved in the operation were happy with the operation. Campbell Soup got good products, and the workers enjoyed their stay in Fairbury.



The most strenuous job in harvesting tomatoes was throwing the 32 pound boxes of tomatoes up onto the semi-truck. Julian Sandoval is throwing up the box and Cruz Sota is catching the box. Harvey Baylor drove the first semi-truck full of tomatoes to the Chicago Campbell Soup factory.

The champion tomato picker at the Goold farm was Mela Aguilar. She could pick 8,800 pounds of tomatoes per day. No men on the crew could match her harvesting speed.

CHAPTER 51

Fascinating Family Life of Judge Woodford McDowell

Judge Woodford G. McDowell was one of the pioneer settlers in the Fairbury area. He founded the villages of Avoca and McDowell and was elected a Livingston County Judge. He also spent about four years in Nebraska and established the new town of Fairbury, Nebraska. Judge McDowell then retired to Washington, DC.

Judge Woodford McDowell's life story begins with his birth in 1818 in Scioto County, Ohio. In 1832, his family emigrated to Illinois, and he became one of the first pioneer settlers in the Fairbury area. Judge McDowell was fourteen years old when he arrived in the Fairbury area.

Unfortunately, just two years after the McDowell family arrived in Fairbury, the patriarch, William McDowell, died at 48 in 1834. William McDowell was a veteran of the War of 1812 and was buried in the Avoca Cemetery. Judge McDowell was 16 years of age when his father died.

In 1842, Woodford G. McDowell married Elizabeth Lane. Woodford was 24, and Elizabeth was 19 when they married. Elizabeth was also born in Ohio. Woodford and Elizabeth McDowell had seven boys and two girls. Only the two girls lived to be adults.

Unfortunately, Elizabeth McDowell died at the age of 42 in 1865. The children of Woodford and Elizabeth McDowell were all adults when she died. Woodford McDowell was 47 when his first wife died.

Two years later, in 1867, Judge McDowell married Marion L. Stone. Both Woodford and Marion were 49 years of age when they married. They had no children.

By 1868, Woodford G. McDowell had observed several things. He saw how the little village of Avoca was wiped out when the Peoria & Oquawka

Railroad laid its tracks about five miles north of Avoca. Fairbury was founded and grew rapidly, so Avoca quickly disappeared. Woodford McDowell also saw how Pontiac grew after it became the county seat in 1837. Woodford McDowell realized a great deal of money was made when relatively inexpensive farmland was converted into city building lots.

Judge McDowell decided to go to Nebraska and try to predict where he could start a new town that would be on a future railroad and become a county seat. Judge McDowell successfully founded the new town of Fairbury, Nebraska, and made a great deal of money. The new town was named after his hometown of Fairbury, Illinois, and was incorporated in 1872.

After just seven years of marriage, Marion McDowell died in Fairbury in 1874 at age 56. She was buried in Graceland Cemetery. At age 56, Judge McDowell became a widower for the second time. The same year his second wife died, Judge McDowell married Anna Elizabeth Chandler.

Anna Chandler was born in 1840 in Ohio. Unfortunately, her father died when she was just two years old. In the 1850 U.S. Census, she was ten years old and lived with her mother and two siblings in Lacon, Illinois.

By the 1860 census, Anna Chandler had married J. L. Mitchell and lived in Lacon, Illinois. Mr. Mitchell was a clerk born in New York. Ten years later, in the 1870 census, Mr. Mitchell disappeared from the scene. Mrs. Anna Mitchell lived with her 64-year-old mother, Levisa Chandler, in Lacon, Illinois. Mr. Mitchell and Anna Chandler apparently had no children.

After living in Fairbury for 13 years, Judge McDowell and his wife, Anna C. McDowell, decided to retire to Washington, D.C., in 1887. Anna McDowell had a widowed sister who married a judge and lived in Washington, D.C.

By the 1880s, Judge McDowell was a relatively wealthy man. He owned farmland in Nebraska and Illinois. When they lived in Fairbury, Anna McDowell started to get involved with many different women's philanthropic groups. When they settled in Washington, DC, Woodford

and Anna McDowell joined the Metropolitan Methodist Church. Anna continued participating in many charitable groups.

Around 1895, a young woman named Mary Elizabeth Mellor began teaching at a missionary school in the village of Unalaska in the territory of Alaska. The City of Unalaska is the main population center in the Aleutian Islands, west of what is now the State of Alaska. Miss Mellor was 22 years old in 1895.

In 1897, Ada Mellor joined her sister, Mary E. Mellor, as a teacher at Unalaska. The two sisters remained there until 1898. Anna McDowell's church group sponsored this type of missionary work.

In 1898, Judge McDowell was 80, and his wife, Anna McDowell, was 58 years of age. Anna never had any children of her own. Anna McDowell likely took an interest in Mary E. Mellor because she was like a daughter she never had. By 1898, Judge McDowell and his wife, Anna McDowell, adopted Mary E. Mellor. In the 1900 Census, 26-year-old Mary Elizabeth Mellor was listed as the adopted daughter. No record was found to indicate the adoption was legally recorded.

Evidence that Judge McDowell was wealthy is shown in the 1900 Census. In that Census, Virginia Roots was their 23-year-old black cook. Frederick Tyler was their 34-year-old black servant.

Judge Woodford G. McDowell died in 1904 in Washington, DC, at the age of 86. His wife, Anna McDowell, was 64 at the time of his death, and his adopted daughter, Mary E. Mellor, was 31.

Estate planning is challenging when you have multiple marriages and children. Judge McDowell left specific tracts of Nebraska farmland to his two living daughters in his will. He stipulated that his wife, Anna McDowell, receive the income from this farmland until she died. Judge McDowell left the balance of his estate to his wife, Anna McDowell. No mention was made of adopted daughter Mary E. Mellor.

Anna McDowell, Judge McDowell's third wife, lived for six more years after the Judge died. A 1910 newspaper article stated that Anna McDowell left $1,000 to each of Judge McDowell's surviving daughters. She also left

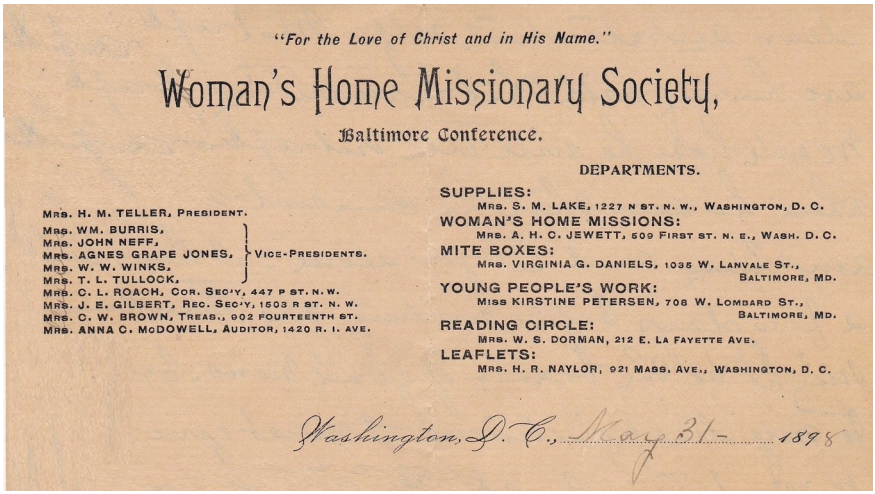
the balance of her estate to her adopted daughter, Mary E. Mellor. Woodford and Anna McDowell were buried in the Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

A copy of Anna McDowell's will was recently obtained from Washington, D.C. officials. Unfortunately, her will does not contain a specific list of assets that the adopted daughter inherited. Anna McDowell likely owned the house in Washington, D.C., and farmland in the Fairbury area. Her adopted daughter, Mary E. Mellor, probably received a significant inheritance when she died. The house owned by Judge McDowell in the Washington, D.C., area has been torn down and replaced by a modern-era building.

Because she was so active in many different philanthropic causes, Anna McDowell's death was widely reported in numerous newspapers.

Mary E. Mellor married briefly and then divorced. When she was 46, she married a second time to Ira Price, a 63-year-old University of Chicago professor. She continued her philanthropic work until she died in 1962 at the age of 88.

Judge McDowell was one of the pioneering settlers in the Fairbury area. He had an interesting family life, including three wives, nine children, and an adopted daughter who did missionary work in Alaska.



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Woman's Home Missionary Society,

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LEAFLETS:
Mrs. H. R. NAYLOR, 921 Mass. Ave., Washington, D. C.

Washington, D. C., May 31 1898

In 1898, Anna McDowell used this stationary to write a letter to her adopted daughter, Mary Elizabeth Mellor, who was stationed in Unalaska, Alaska, as a missionary teacher. Note that Anna McDowell was the Auditor of the Women's Home Missionary Society. Mrs. Anna McDowell later became President of this group.

CHAPTER 52

Fairbury's Worst Drowning Incident

One of the most shocking accidents in Fairbury history occurred in 1948 when three young Besgrove children drowned in Indian Creek just southwest of Fairbury.

The Besgrove family's story began with James Brownsey Besgrove's birth in 1846 in Somersetshire, England. His parents were Charles Besgrove (1814-1862) and Eliza Brownsey (1815-1898). The James and Eliza Besgrove family had seven children.

In 1862, Charles Besgrove died in England at the age of 48, and his wife Eliza became a widow at the age of 47. She was left to care for three minor children between the ages of ten and sixteen. James B. Besgrove, who was 16 when his father died, decided to emigrate to America. His voyage from England to New York City took five weeks and three days on a sailing vessel.

As soon as James B. Besgrove arrived in New York, he traveled to Albany, New York, and he was penniless. Somehow, he communicated with his brother Henry, who had emigrated to America already. Henry instructed James B. Besgrove to come to McLean County, Illinois, and live with him. James worked on farms in McLean County as a hired hand for three years. James was paid $200 per year and grossed $600 from his three years of work. This gross amount would equal about $18,600 in today's dollars.

James B. Besgrove saved his money, and in 1865, he bought 80 acres of farmland in Belle Prairie Township south of Fairbury in Section One. James lived frugally and was able to buy another 80 acres. Several of James B. Besgrove's siblings emigrated from England to Howard County, Missouri.

In 1872, James B. Besgrove married Miss Elizabeth "Fanny" Masters. She had also been born in Somersetshire, England. When both of her parents died in England, she emigrated to America. Her parents were William T.

Masters (1810-1862) and Fanny White (1810-1871). James was 26, and Fanny was 21 when they married. They had 11 children, with one child dying in infancy.

James B. Besgrove died in 1907 at the age of 60, and his wife, Fanny Besgrove, died in 1936 at 85. They were both buried at Graceland Cemetery in Fairbury.

One of the 11 children of James and Fanny Besgrove was Roy Early Besgrove (1891-1984). Roy married Eva L. Hornbeck (1890-1967) in 1913. He was 22, and she was 23. They had no children.

1924 Roy E. Besgrove married Mabel Esther Brown (1895-1986). He was 33, and she was 28. He farmed in the Fairbury area. Roy and Mabel Besgrove had one child, Carroll Besgrove (1929-2017). In 1953, Carroll Besgrove married Mary Lou Logan from Decatur. He was 24, and she was 22. They had three children. He farmed in the Fairbury area. Carroll Besgrove died in 2017 at the age of 88.

Mary Lou Besgrove received her bachelor of arts degree in music from Milliken University in Decatur. She taught music in public schools for over 30 years, 27 of which were in the Fairbury-Cropsey school district. She died in 2020 at the age of 88.

Another of the 11 children of James and Fanny Besgrove was Herbert J. Besgrove (1875-1946). In 1901, he married Elizabeth Jane Stuckey (1873-1960). He was 25, and she was 27. They had one child, Clarence E. Besgrove (1901-1958).

In 1932, Clarence E. Besgrove married Mary Linenweber in Minocqua, Wisconsin. He was 30, and she was 28. They had three girls and one boy. The Clarence and Mary Besgrove family moved around, living in Wisconsin, Strawn, and Chenoa.

In early May 1948, Clarence Besgrove took a job as a hired hand for Eli Meiss south of Fairbury. The Besgrove family moved from Chenoa to a house on South Clay Street. Three of the four Besgrove children twice went swimming in Indian Creek just south of their home, in the shallow part of the creek.

At one time, there was a slaughterhouse on Indian Creek just south of Clay Street. Near the slaughterhouse, there was a "hole" in the creek, where the water was five to six feet deep.

On Thursday, June 3, 1948, at 3 PM, three Besgrove children asked their mother for permission to swim in Indian Creek. These three children included June Beth Besgrove, age 14, Sylvia Marie Besgrove, age 13, and Frank Edgar Besgrove, age 10. Mrs. Besgrove permitted them to swim as long as they stayed in the shallow water and came home for supper. Six-year-old Annie Jane Besgrove stayed home with her mother.

At 6:30 PM, when the children had not come home for supper, Mr. and Mrs. Besgrove went to the creek and found all three children had drowned and were floating in the creek. They summoned help, but the children had been dead too long to revive them.

A coroner's inquest was held regarding the three drownings. Sergeant Virgil Munz of the Illinois State Police testified the "hole" in Indian Creek where the children drowned was between five and six feet deep. The water was only about three feet deep, where the children had previously swam two times. The drownings were ruled to be accidental.

A triple funeral was held at the Cook Funeral Home in Fairbury. This funeral home was small and across the street south from the current Duffy-Pils Memorial Home. Three identical caskets were used for the funeral. The three sets of pallbearers were second cousins of the deceased children and were from Chatsworth, Wing, and Fairbury. They were Roscoe Runyon, Keith Coleman, James Coleman, Arland Kuntz, Bob Kuntz, Edmond Coleman, Clarence Pearson, Elmer Runyon, James Brown, Ivan Brown, Carroll Besgrove, and Carl Rapp.

Clarence Besgrove, father of the three deceased children, died in 1958 at the age of 56. After Clarence Besgrove died, his widow married Clarence Leland Neal in 1959. Mr. Neal died in 1965. Mrs. Clarence Besgrove passed away in 1972 at the age of 67. Clarence and Mary Besgrove were buried in Graceland Cemetery near the triple stone for their three children who drowned.

Annie Jane Besgrove, the only remaining child of Clarence and Mary Besgrove, married Clarence F. Blue in Odell in 1966. Clarence and Annie Blue had one child. Annie Blue died in 1991 in Kankakee at the age of 48.

The Fairbury area experienced many drownings before the first swimming pool was built in 1958. After the swimming pool was built, there was a dramatic reduction in drownings. The drowning deaths of the three young Besgrove children in 1948 were one of the worst tragedies in Fairbury history.

June Besgrove
14 Years Old.

Sylvia Besgrove
13 Years Old.

Frank Besgrove
10 Years Old.

CHAPTER 53

Fairbury's Most Difficult Construction Challenge

In the Fall of 1977, the local elevator decided to build a large new complex at the southeast corner of Locust and Fifth Streets. Unfortunately, a massive water vein disrupted the foundation construction for several weeks. This water problem stumped the experts and delayed the $1 million project by about a month.

To understand why there was such a vast underground water problem at this location, we must look at the geological history of Fairbury over the last 10,000 years. Before the glaciers leveled the area, our area was mostly covered with rolling hills of rock. The three glaciers descending from Canada to Southern Illinois ground the hills into gravel and sand. When the last glacier melted about 10,000 years ago, the Fairbury area had glacial deposits of fifty to 100 feet deep on top of the rock.

In some locations, the low spots in the original rock were filled with gravel and sand with topsoil on the surface layer. This gravel and sand can hold up to 30 percent of its volume in groundwater. These formations are called underground aquifers.

In May 1914, the Illinois Water Survey division visited Fairbury and assessed the City's water supply. This assessment report used an 1899 book by Frank Leverett titled ***Illinois Glacial Lobe***. In this book, Mr. Leverett stated that rock in the Fairbury area is found at a depth of 50 to 90 feet. A coal vein is located 150 to 200 feet below the ground. Most private wells in the Fairbury area are 18 to 55 feet deep. The water from these private wells comes from the sand and gravel layer below the soil.

Fairbury's first public drinking water system was built in 1887 at the northwest corner of Locust and First Streets. The SELCAS ambulance service building is now located there.

In 1887, an open well 25 feet deep and 25 feet in diameter was dug. A steam-powered pump forced the water through 3,300 feet of eight-inch-diameter water mains to homes and businesses. In 1890, this 25-foot-deep well provided enough water for 2,324 residents.

In 1892, a new well was drilled at that exact location to a depth of 2,000 feet. A 60-foot-long section of six-inch casing was installed at a depth of 1,500 feet to keep very salty water out of the well. An 8-inch casing was used from the ground level to a depth of 394 feet. The rest of the well had no casing installed. The pump was placed at a depth of 252 feet.

No records were available in 1914 to indicate how much water the 2,000-foot-deep well produced. Officials estimated that 400,000 gallons per day were produced. This rate is equivalent to 278 gallons per minute. As a point of reference, the average faucet in a Fairbury home will discharge about five gallons per minute.

In March of 1978, Koehl Brothers of Fairbury removed two 24-foot by 50-foot grain silos to prepare for building the new $1 million elevator complex. Workers involved with removing the old silos included Jim Kafer, Willie Meister, Mike Peters, and Steve Ricketts. Keith Coleman was the elevator manager in that era.

Once the old silos had been removed, soil borings were done to assess the soil structure that would be below the new complex. These borings did not indicate any excessive groundwater present.

The construction crew started to excavate to make a hole to pour the new concrete foundation. Two torrents of underground water poured into the hole at about 250 gallons per minute when they broke through a layer of blue clay. The water was encountered at a depth of about 20 feet.

The first fix tried was to pump out the water and discharge it into the sewer system. This attempt failed because the pumps could not keep up, and the dirty water created problems at the city waste treatment plant.

The second attempt to fix the problem was to build a concrete box with no top or bottom on the ground. The hole was then filled with sand. The idea

was to lower the box into the hole, and it would stop the torrent of water from pouring into the hole. Material would be excavated from the interior of the concrete box, causing it to sink because of its weight. The crew got the concrete box dropped, but it did not stop the excessive water flow into the hole. There was too much water to pour into the concrete base.

The third idea was to pump the water south several blocks using four-inch diameter hoses to Route 24. The water went down a storm sewer, which discharged it into Indian Creek. This attempt failed because the pump could not empty the water fast enough. Many current Fairbury residents remember the big hoses that temporarily ran along Sixth Street to Route 24.

Artesian well experts were called to Fairbury to consult on how to solve the excessive groundwater problem. The fourth idea developed was to hire a company that specialized in driving steel pilings into the ground. Steel pilings are often used in construction in other parts of the United States.

On May 25, 1978, forty-foot-long interlocking steel pilings were driven into the ground around the concrete box. These pilings slowed down the water enough to pour concrete into the bottom of the hollow concrete boxes. The excessive water problem delayed the construction of the 120-foot tall elevator complex by about four weeks.

In hindsight, the finding of the enormous underground water source in 1978 should not have been a surprise. Back in 1887, the City dug its first well, which was just 25 feet deep, and it likely produced about 278 gallons per minute on average.

The location for the new elevator was just four blocks to the east of the first City well. At the new elevator location, they found water at a rate of 250 gallons per minute at a depth of 20 feet. The depth and flow rates of the water supply at these two locations were about the same.

Back in 1978, nobody remembered the first City dug well at the northwest corner of Locust and First Streets in 1887. Although it took four tries, the excessive water problem was solved, and the new elevator was built.

Keith Coleman, the elevator manager in 1978, made a scrapbook that chronicled all the issues of this construction project. Keith donated his scrapbook to the Fairbury Echoes Museum, and information from the scrapbook was used to help write this story.

In May of 1978, 40 foot long steel piling sheets were pounded into the ground to form a rectangular steel dam to keep out the excessive 250 gallons per minute water flow into the new grain bin foundation hole. The steel pilings slowed down the water flow into the hole so a new concrete foundation could be poured.

CHAPTER 54

Nakamaru's Well-Known Residents

Watt and Sunny Nakamaru were well-known Fairbury residents from the 1960s through the 1980s. Watt had a unique profession as a chicken sexer. Watt was also a photographer. Sunny was well known because of her work at the Fairbury Hospital.

The story of this family began with the birth of Wataru "Watt" Nakamaru in 1923 in Fresno, California. His parents were Yasaburo Nakamaru and Chika Takami (1898-1932). His parents were born in Japan and emigrated to the United States. Shortly after Watt was born in California, his family returned to Japan. Watt grew up in Japan.

In 1925, Mioko "Sunny" Mikasa was born in Moneta, California. Her parents were Nikichi Mikasa (1886-1942) and Mase Imoto Mikas (1880-1980). Both of her parents were born in Japan, and they emigrated to America.

In the 1930 Census, four-year-old Sunny Mikasa lived with her family in Newport Beach, California. Her father's occupation was a farmer. A total of five children lived in the household.

Fourteen-year-old Watt Nakamaru left Japan in 1937 to live again in America. In the 1940 Census, Watt listed his occupation as a Los Angeles houseboy for the John and Ruth McCandless family, including nine-month-old Keith McCandless.

In the 1940 Census, Sunny Mikasa was 14 years old and living with her family in Dinuba, California. She listed her occupation as a farm worker.

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This event marked the start of World War II for America. The United States was entirely caught off guard by the Pearl Harbor bombing.

Many Americans experienced panic, and they were very concerned Japan would launch a land invasion of the United States. Just a few months after

the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Orders to send all Americans of Japanese descent to Internment Camps. This Executive Order impacted at least 125,000 people, most of whom lived on the West Coast. Approximately two-thirds of the inmates were United States citizens. This massive group of people was sent to 75 different incarceration sites.

Nineteen-year-old Watt Nakamaru was sent to the Manzanar Japanese internment camp in California, which opened in March 1942. Seventeen-year-old Sunny Mikasa was sent to the Poston Relocation Center in California, which opened in May 1942. Sunny finished high school while she was held in the camp.

In December of 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to hold American citizens against their will. The internment camps were immediately shut down, and the inmates were allowed to return to their homes. Most of the people in the camps were held for about two and a half years in these camps.

There was a massive shortage of nurses during World War II. Before her release from the internment camp, Sunny Mikasa attended the St. Mary's Hospital Training School for Nurses in Quincy, Illinois. In November of 1944, Sunny was issued a United States Cadet Nurse Corps Membership card.

Around 1949, Watt Nakamaru attended an eight-month training program in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. In a 1982 Pantagraph article, Watt recounted that chicken sexing originated in Japan in the 1940s. He said the occupation seemed to be a specialty of Orientals because some Koreans could also perform this job. The job of a chicken sexer is to determine the sex of the chickens when they are babies since the female of the species is more important than the male to egg producers. In the 1982 interview, Watt reported that he could sort 1,000 to 1,200 chickens per hour with a 99 percent accuracy.

In 1949, Watt Nakamaru and Sunny Mikasa were married. They eventually had three children. In the 1950 Census, the Nakamaru family lived in Winona Lake, Indiana. Twenty-four-year-old Sunny listed her occupation as a registered nurse. Twenty-six-year-old Watt Nakamaru

listed his occupation as a chicken separator for the American Cutting Company.

The 1959 Pantagraph published an article reporting that chicken sexers were very busy at the Honegger Farms in Forrest, Illinois. Honeggers employed two men to determine the sex of day-old chicks. It was reported that less than 1,000 persons in the United States were qualified to sort chicks at a high rate with 99 percent accuracy. Honeggers was considering hiring a third person to sort chicks because they were hatching anywhere from 25,000 to 160,000 chicks weekly. The article included a photo of Watt Nakamaru sorting chicks at the Forrest facility.

Also, around 1959, Watt Nakamaru started his photography hobby by taking photos of family and friends. He also experimented with video recording and took videos of the Fairbury swimming pool, the Forest Hatchery, the Indian Creek Golf Course, and the Homecoming Parade. These circa 1959 videos have been preserved and can be viewed from the Fairbury Echoes Museum website.

In 1974, the Daily Leader reported that Watt was opening a new business at his Fairbury home, Watt's Photo Service. Watt planned on taking professional photographs of engagements, weddings, anniversaries, and family portraits.

Sunny Nakamura worked at the Fairbury Hospital and eventually became the Director of Nursing. Both Watt and Sunny Nakamaru loved playing golf at the Indian Creek Golf Course.

Watt and Sunny Nakamaru retired to Lakeland, Florida. Both Watt and Sunny played in many golf tournaments in Florida. Watt Nakamaru died in 2008 at the age of 85, and Sunny Nakamaru passed away in 2016 at the age of 91. Watt and Sunny Nakamaru were an essential part of the Fairbury community for several decades.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. This act provided financial redress of $20,000 for each former detainee of the WWII internment camps who was still alive when the act was passed, totaling $1.2 billion.

On December 7, 1991, on the 50th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, President George H. Bush issued a formal apology from the U.S. government to all people who were detained in the WWII internment camps. President Bush said the internment of Americans of Japanese ancestry was a great injustice, and it will never be repeated. By 1998, over 81,800 people qualified for the payments, and $1.6 billion was distributed among them.

Miyoko Mikasa (Sunny Nakamaru) in her U.S. Cadet Nursing uniform. Watt Nakamaru sexing chickens at Honeggers in the early 1960s.

CHAPTER 55

Sixteen Horses Lost in 1981 Fire

Many Fairbury residents remember the concrete block horse barns that ran parallel to South First Street and across the road from Westview Grade School. In 1981, these horse barns burned, and 16 horses were lost in this tragic fire.

Horse racing at the Fairbury Fair likely dates back to the first year of the Fairbury Fair, 1876. Automobiles only appeared in large numbers in Fairbury after 1908, when Henry Ford introduced his Model T. Before automobile racing, one of the significant events at the annual fair was horse racing.

The Sanborn Insurance Company made maps of Fairbury from 1885 to 1924. The earliest Sanborn map showing the fairground is the 1911 map. This map shows a small horse barn with 30 stalls south of the Third Street fairground entrance.

The 1911 Sanborn map also shows three horse barns in the northwest corner of the fairgrounds. These stalls ran north-south, and each barn had 40 stalls. The 1911 map does not show any horse barns parallel to First Street.

The 1924 Sanborn map shows the same horse barns as the 1911 map, except a long row of 332-foot-long racehorse stalls was added parallel to First Street. This long horse barn was built sometime between 1911 and 1924.

Around 3 AM on Tuesday, June 30, 1981, the long row of horse barns parallel to First Street burned to the ground. A total of 16 horses were lost in this fire. Seven different parties owned the 16 horses that were lost. The Livingston County Sheriff's Office estimated the total financial loss exceeded $1 million.

In financial terms, Howard Wilden "Bill" Harris (1916-2013) experienced the most significant loss in this fire. Although Harris only lost three

horses, one of them, Scot Dancer, was a precious horse. This horse was the best three-year-old pacer in the State of Illinois.

Scot Dancer, the Harris standard-bearer, earned $206,000 in lifetime earnings, equaling $701,000 in today's dollars. This horse won the Governor's Cup for two-year-old Illinois-bred pacers at the 1980 Hambletonian program at DuQuoin. In 1981, Scot Dancer was on the path to collecting another $300,000 in race purses. The projected earnings for Scot Dancer in 1981 would equal $1.02 million in today's dollars.

Frank Vaughan and his son, Mark Vaughan, lost eight active racing horses in the fire. Their best horse was Flash Magoo, a three-year-old trotter who held the track record for two-year-olds at Chicago's Maywood Park.

Si Schmidtgall lost a pair of standardbred colts in the fire. John Leonard owned the final standardbred lost in the blaze. She was a mare who had just returned to training after raising a colt. Two saddle horses owned by Mary Schmidtgall and Phil Tetley rounded out the inventory of lost animals.

The Fairbury horse barns started to burn around 3 AM on Tuesday, June 30, 1981. At about 1 AM the same night, another fire started at the Balmoral Race Track in Crete, south of Chicago. Thirty-three horses were killed in the Balmoral fire. Six people received minor injuries, including four firefighters. The firefighters were treated for minor burns and smoke inhalation.

The State of Illinois arson investigators inspected the Fairbury and Balmoral horse barns but found no evidence of arson. A total of 49 horses were lost in these two tragic fires.

Howard Wilden "Bill" Harris was born in Wayne County, Illinois, in 1916. Wayne County is in Southern Illinois, about 100 miles east of St. Louis. Bill's parents were Charles Bryan "Charlie" or "Blackie" Harris (1896-1988) and Lelah Smith (1896-1964).

Bill Harris had a daughter, Nancy N. Harris, born in 1936 in Cropsey. Nancy's mother is not known at this time. Bill then married Maxine

Audrey Stillwell (1920-1993) in 1941. Maxine was born in Minnesota. Bill and Maxine Harris had no children.

Bill worked as an electrical lineman. He was involved with horse racing for many years. Bill and Maxine lived in Henry County, Elgin, Cropsey, and Fairbury. When Bill and Maxine Harris lived in Fairbury, their home was at 504 South Webster Street. Maxine Harris died in 1993 at the age of 72. After Maxine died, Bill Harris married Emily Popejoy, the former Postmaster of Cropsey. Emily Harris died in 1998 at the age of 65. Bill Harris lived the last few years of his life with his daughter in Odenton, Maryland. Bill Harris died in 2013 at the age of 96.

Bill Harris's father, Blackie Harris, was one of the most notorious criminals in Southern Illinois. The 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibited the consumption and sale of alcohol from 1920 until it was repealed in 1933. In the Chicago area, Al Capone was the leader of a criminal enterprise that provided thirsty Americans with illegal alcohol during Prohibition.

In St. Louis, Peoria, and Southern Illinois, the Shelton Gang ran a bootlegging operation for illegal alcohol. The Shelton Gang was initially formed by three brothers from Wayne County, Illinois: Carl, Earl, and Bernie "Red" Shelton. The Shelton Gang were the main rivals of the famous bootlegger Charles Birger and his gang. In 1950, the Saturday Evening Post described the Sheltons as "America's Bloodiest Gang."

Blackie Harris grew up in the same county as the Shelton brothers. Blackie joined the gang, and they sent him to Detroit to help smuggle Canadian-made alcohol into the United States. Blackie was arrested and convicted of bootlegging and distribution of counterfeit money. He served nine years in Leavenworth federal prison.

After Blackie finished his prison sentence, there was speculation that he was unhappy with the Shelton brothers. One by one, the Shelton brothers were shot. Blackie Harris was suspected of murdering some of the Shelton brothers, but he was never convicted for these crimes.

Although Blackie Harris was married, authorities believed he had a romantic relationship with 32-year-old Mrs. Charles Newton, a neighbor to

his farm. Shortly after the woman began a romantic relationship with 28-year-old Jerry Merritt, these two people were shot and killed in a house in 1964. The house was then burned to the ground.

An arrest warrant for these two murders was issued, but Blackie Harris went on the run. He was added to the FBI's most wanted list of fugitives. He eventually turned himself in to authorities and was convicted of both murders. Blackie Harris received a sentence of 75 years, but he only served 15 years. Blackie then retired and lived with a niece in Kansas until he died in 1988 at the age of 91.

Author Taylor Pensoneau has written two books about the Shelton Gang and Blackie Harris. In 2002, he wrote his first book, ***Brothers Notorious: The Sheltons - Southern Illinois' Legendary Gangsters***. In 2010, he wrote his second book, ***Dapper & Deadly: The True Story of Black Charlie Harris***.

In the years after the 1981 fire, attendance at the Fairbury Fair's harness races gradually declined. The last harness races were at the 2006 Fairbury Fair. Many citizens have fond memories of watching the horse races and wish they were still part of the annual Fairbury Fair.

Horse racing at the Fairbury Fair in August of 1939.

CHAPTER 56

History Is Preserved in Interesting Ways

On October 27, 1830, Valentine Martin Darnall and his wife Rachel Darnall arrived six miles south of Fairbury and became the first white settlers in Livingston County.

One hundred years later, in 1930, the Rev. J. H. Ryan was the President of the Livingston County Historical Society. Henry J. Mies (1869-1932) was one of its founding members in 1924.

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Darnall family arriving at their new home south of Fairbury, Rev. Ryan and Henry Mies decided to hold a celebration event. This event would be on the farm of William D. Spence, great-grandson of Valentine and Rachel Darnall. A memorial stone and plaque were created and placed on this farm.

The event was significant, with 144 direct descendants of Mr. and Mrs. Darnall plus several hundred other descendants and friends. The Fairbury Blade newspaper published a long story about this event on August 29, 1930.

Henry Mies of Saunemin was an avid collector of Native American artifacts. He was also an amateur photographer. Henry learned how to take photographs using glass negatives. By 1930, glass negatives were obsolete technology. To be more historically accurate, Henry decided to take glass plate negative photos of the Darnall descendants at the event. Copies of this panoramic photograph still exist. Marilyn Wells of Fairbury is the only descendant in the old picture still living. She was a six-year-old girl sitting in the front row with her brother, Howard Payne. Marilyn Wells had her 100th birthday in February 2024. Fairbury photographer Dudley Fultz also took a panoramic photograph of the Darnall descendants that day.

The Darnall celebration was not the only photographic event planned on that Saturday. After taking photos at the Spence farm south of Fairbury,

Henry Mies took his photographic equipment about 10 miles east to Oliver's Grove south of Chatsworth.

In 1850, Simon and Barbara Young emigrated from Ohio to Livingston County, Illinois. When they reached the area now known as Chatsworth, they camped for the night at Franklin Oliver's home. Their son, Thomas N. Young, was eight years old when they visited Franklin Oliver. Franklin Oliver showed them several area sites, including his first house, an Indian burial ground, the location of the corn crib built by the Kickapoo tribe, and the old Kickapoo and Potawatomi Trail. This tour by Franklin Oliver made a life-long impression on eight-year-old T. N. Young.

Eighty years later, in 1930, Thomas N. Young was 87 years old. Mr. Young wanted Henry Mies to photographically document the sites Franklin Oliver showed him 80 years earlier. Mr. Mies took four photographs of Mr. Young illustrating the sites' locations.

Henry Mies was tragically killed in October 1932 near Jacksonville, Illinois. He drove his car onto a railroad crossing and was killed by the collision with the train. His wife was seriously injured but survived the accident. Henry Mies was only 63 years old when he died. Thomas N. Young died in 1935 at the age of 92.

The photographic glass plates that Mies had of the 1930 photographs were passed along to his son and then to Carl T. Hunsicker (1904-1989). Mr. Hunsicker was a Pontiac resident and also was interested in photography. Mr. Hunsicker owned and operated Hunsicker Sign and Outdoor Advertising in Pontiac from 1926 to 1949. He served 14 years as an alderman in Pontiac's 5th Ward and served on the Livingston County Board of Supervisors from 1951 to 1961. Mr. Hunsicker then served 12 years as the Illinois State Representative for the 38th District. Carl Hunsicker was a member of the Chief City Camera Club.

Mr. Hunsicker died in 1989 at the age of 84. After his death, one of his descendants was assigned to clean out the photographic dark room that Mr. Hunsicker used for his photography hobby. The descendant boxed up the old plate glass negatives and took the boxes to his home. The descendant contacted Roger Kutzner of the Livingston County Historical Society to see if the Society wanted any materials from the dark room.

Roger went to the descendant's home and saved the four glass plate negatives that documented the Thomas N. Young photographic session at Oliver's Grove in 1930.

Roger used a couple of different photography shops to get paper prints made from the glass plate negatives. Roger donated copies of these four photo prints to the Dixon Mounds Museum, the Chatsworth Historical Society, and the Livingston County Historical Society.

In January 2023, current Livingston County Historical Society President Dale C. Maley cleaned and organized all of the artifacts in the Historical Society's archives. Mr. Maley discovered the four paper prints from 1930 at Oliver's Grove. These four prints were scanned and uploaded to Archive.Org, a website that allows anyone to view or download copies of these documents.

Franklin Oliver's first cabin burned in 1877. Mr. Oliver built a second cabin in which he lived until he died in 1881. The location of the second cabin is known to Chatsworth area descendants of Franklin Oliver, but the location of the first cabin was still being determined.

Computer copies of the four prints were shared with some of the Historical Society members from Chatsworth. They used the 1930 photographs to find the location of Franklin Oliver's first cabin.

It took a unique combination of events to preserve the four 1930 photographs of the Oliver Grove area south of Chatsworth. Henry Mies and Thomas N. Young had the foresight to capture the critical locations before either of them died. Carl Hunsicker preserved the glass negatives. Roger Kutzner used the negatives to make print copies, which were donated to the Livingston County Historical Society. The digital copies of these 1930 printed photographs will be preserved for many more decades to come on the Archive.Org website. Future researchers can easily find and examine copies of these historic old photographs.

Panoramic photograph of descendants of pioneer settlers Valentine and Rachael Darnall who settled south of Fairbury in 1830. Photo taken by Dudley Fultz on August 23, 1930. Marilyn Payne - Wells is the young girl in the front row, the 14th person from the left hand side. Marilyn recently celebrated her 100th birthday and is the only person in the photograph known to still be living.

CHAPTER 57

Fairbury's First Consolidation with Cropsey

The Prairie-Central school district is conducting a series of meetings with the public to determine the long-range plan for school facilities. The first major change in Fairbury schools was the consolidation with Cropsey in 1950, which occurred during an era of dramatic changes in the educational system.

As early as 1860, country schools were established to educate farm children in the Fairbury area. Farms were typically 80 to 160 acres, and farmers had many children to help on the farm. Country schools were established every two miles with the idea that a country student would not have to walk more than a mile to school. Eventually, Livingston County had a total of 299 country schools. These country schools were designed to accommodate about 20 students each.

With farm mechanization, less labor was required on area farms. As farms increased in size, fewer children were required to help on the farm. The number of rural students in 1897 in Livingston County was 6,000. By 1947, the number had decreased to 1,200. By 1947, on average, there were only four rural students per country school.

Between 1947 and 1950, almost all country schools in Livingston County were closed. The few remaining students went to school in the nearest town. The old country school buildings were sold at public auction.

In addition to closing country schools, many schools in small towns were too small in enrollment. During World War II, there was also a significant shortage of available teachers. Many men enlisted in the military or took higher-paying jobs in war production factories.

These issues became significant enough that the State of Illinois Legislature got involved. In 1943, the Illinois State Legislature passed a new law that worsened the teacher shortage. The new law changed the college requirement from 2 years to four years to earn a teaching

certificate. Most Fairbury area teachers traditionally attended Illinois State Normal University for two years and got their teaching certificate.

In 1945, the State Legislature passed another law requiring each county to conduct a survey of its schools for reorganization. To comply with the new law, County School Superintendent Lucille Goodrich set up a committee to perform the study. Fairbury's representative on the survey committee was Elmer Bailey. The Livingston County survey report was completed and published on November 10, 1947.

Livingston, McLean, Ford, Logan, and Tazewell counties all received a "very inferior" rating from the State of Illinois.

As a result of the survey, many schools voted to consolidate. In 1946 and 1947, seventeen new school districts were created in Livingston County. Fairbury and Cropsey were not one of the seventeen new districts. State officials also recommended that Fairbury and Forrest consolidate.

In 1947, the Illinois State Legislature passed another education-related law, the New Community School District Act, which also impacted school consolidation decisions. For example, any new community school district had to have a minimum population of 2,000 residents.

These new state laws created a panic among small towns. Many towns scrambled to pursue consolidation with neighboring towns to meet the 2,000-resident requirement. Fairbury and Cropsey set up an election in May of 1948 for consolidation. This vote failed. Fairbury citizens voted 165 in favor and nine against. Cropsey residents voted 99 in favor and 152 against. By law, the proposition had to pass in both Fairbury and Cropsey.

After a series of lawsuits with Livingston County, a new consolidation vote between Fairbury and Cropsey was conducted on December 21, 1949. It rained heavily on voting day, and turnout was light. The voting results were that consolidation passed with 430 in favor and 120 against. Fairbury citizens voted 210 for and 38 against. Cropsey voted 153 yes and 30 no. Avoca Township voted nine yes and 29 no. Temple Country School voted 58 yes and 23 no.

The Fairbury-Cropsey District 3 would start operations in the Fall of 1950. Elections were held in January 1950 for the new school board members. In this election, the winners were Ben Zehr, Harold Elliott, Bernard Brucker, A. Keith Anderson, Vernon Stephens, James Goold, and John Householder.

The unsuccessful candidates for the school board were Herman J. Kilgus, Charles E. Schuler, Horace Goembel, Everett E. McCullough, and Erma Winslow.

In May 1949, the Cropsey senior class presented the last Cropsey high school play "Winning Schemers". Actors with the leading roles included Joyce Bachtold, Gwendolyn DeFries, and Gerald Barnes. The supporting cast members included Dale Scott, James Franklin, Charles Ward, Dorothy Steinlicht, Mary Convis, and Joan Elliott. The proceeds from the play financed the Senior graduation cruise to Mackinac Island, Sault Saint Marie.

The late 1940s were a tumultuous time for Fairbury and Cropsey residents. The country school system, which had worked well for more than 80 years, was abolished. The remaining school system was disrupted with the consolidation of Fairbury and Cropsey. Fortunately, all of the problems of consolidation were solved, and Fairbury-Cropsey District 3 was successful for many decades until it was consolidated into the Prairie Central school system.

FAIRBURY-CROPSEY HIGH SCHOOL

TARTARS

HANDBOOK

Prepared by
the
F.C.H.S. STUDENT COUNCIL

CHAPTER 58

Prairie Central 1985 Consolidation

The Prairie-Central school district is conducting a series of meetings with the public to determine the long-range plan for school facilities. One of the significant changes in Fairbury schools was the formation of the Prairie Central School system in 1985.

As with many school consolidations, the consolidation of Fairbury-Cropsey High School, Forrest-Strawn-Wing High School, and Chatsworth High School had its share of dramatic twists and turns. This excitement included initial resistance from the Chatsworth school board, resistance from a Fairbury citizens group, negative comments by a Fairbury social gadfly, and last-minute legislative changes in Springfield, Illinois.

In the 1980s, many Illinois small towns struggled with declining enrollment and decreases in state funding. In May 1984, the Blade published an article with many observations from Gordon Hoke, an Illinois rural and school development specialist from the University of Illinois. Hoke noted that the last significant change in Illinois schools was back in 1947 when country schools were abolished and many town schools consolidated. Hoke predicted that 1984 and 1985 would see a revolution in education concerning school consolidation.

Hoke noted that Illinois ranked third in the nation with 1,010 public schools. Only Texas and California, with much larger populations than Illinois, had the most public schools. Hoke observed that Michigan and Ohio, with populations closer to Illinois, had less than half the schools Illinois had. Hoke noted a trend toward consolidating into one school system per county in Illinois.

At the state level, politicians in Springfield favored more school consolidations. They passed laws requiring the State of Illinois to pay off the schools' debt if a group of schools consolidated.

The first mention of a possible school consolidation was on April 5, 1984. Blade reporter Rick Jones wrote an article saying that talk of consolidation

was back in the air and Fairbury-Cropsey would be a prize catch in consolidation plans. It was estimated that Fairbury-Cropsey High School would increase from 233 to 303 students in the next four years.

Enrollment at Forrest-Strawn-Wing High School was expected to decline from 166 to 133 students in four years, and at Chatsworth High School, 76 to 69 students. Jones noted that if Fairbury-Cropsey and Forrest-Strawn-Wing consolidated, the high school would have 432 students. Adding Chatsworth would bring another 50 to 60 students.

Later, in April 1984, the Blade reported that talks had begun between the three school boards. All three districts would be required to submit signatures to the county and then to the State. An election would then be held on November 5, 1984.

Talks between the three school systems continued. A plan was developed for each town to keep a grade school. The junior high school would be in Forrest, and the high school would be in Fairbury. The consolidated school system would start operations on July 1, 1985. Some Chatsworth residents favored consolidating with Ford Central or some other school district.

In late May, the Fairbury-Cropsey school board voted 7-0 in favor of consolidation. The FSW school board voted 6-1 in favor, with Mrs. Ruth Benway casting the one negative vote. The Chatsworth board voted 5-2 against the proposal. At a meeting, many Chatsworth residents disagreed with their school board's vote and suggested they start a petition drive to support the consolidation.

The Chatsworth board wanted someone other than one of the three superintendents to become the new consolidated school superintendent. They were informed that the new superintendent's decision would be up to the new school board. The Chatsworth board also wanted a written agreement that the new board would have three members from Fairbury-Cropsey, two from FSW, and two from Chatsworth. They were informed this was satisfactory with the FCHS and FSW boards, but it could only be put in writing after the school consolidation vote.

One of the many benefits of the consolidation was that the State of Illinois would pay the $800,000 in debt held by the FSW and Chatsworth school systems.

At one of the public hearings, 19 of 20 people expressed support for the consolidation. The only dissenter was Roger W. Wessels (1940-2018), a farmer who lived west of Fairbury on Route 24. He commented, "Until you figure out how you're going to finance education, the only thing I'm going to vote for is roads." Roger often wrote letters to the Editor expressing his opposition to many proposals to improve life in the Fairbury area.

In June, over 500 citizens from the three school districts submitted their petition for consolidation to Wayne Blunier, the Regional Superintendent of Schools. By law, only 200 signatures were needed. Blunier held a public hearing at FSW High School and then sent the request to the Illinois Office of Education to approve it and place it on the November ballot.

About four months before the November vote, Wayne Blunier and Fairbury-Cropsey Superintendent Calvin Jackson went to Springfield. They discovered that after they submitted their consolidation request, legislators changed the law so that instead of the State of Illinois paying off the $800,000 debt of FSW and Chatsworth, the State would only pay $300,000. With help from local politicians John Maitland and Tom Ewing, an emergency exemption was rushed through the legislature and approved. The state funding was restored to the $800,000 amount.

Historically, both sides of any vital voting issue would publicize their comments in the Blade newspaper just before the election date. The school consolidation vote was an emotional issue in all the communities impacted by the change. Patty Fosdick, a Concerned Citizens for Education But Against Consolidation group member, paid for a large ad against consolidation in the Blade. Jack Kennedy of Fairbury and Marilyn and Gary Elliott of Cropsey wrote Letters to the Editor in favor of consolidation. Blade employees Jim Roberts and Rick Jones wrote columns in support of consolidation.

In November, the consolidation of the three school systems was approved by more than a two-to-one margin. The yes votes were 2,490, and the no

votes were 1,358. After the vote, the three school boards honored their prior "gentlemen's agreement" by offering three school board candidates from FCHS, two from FSW, and two from Chatsworth.

These seven candidates were then elected to the new consolidated school board. They included Mrs. Cindy Helmers, Jim Paternoster, and Richard Zehr from Fairbury-Cropsey. The FSW members were Art Lehman and Roger Brown. The Chatsworth members were Francis Haberkorn and Keith Henrichs.

A contest was held to select a new school name and a mascot. The previous mascots and colors were FCHS Fighting Tartars (green and yellow gold), FSW Fighting Eskimos (red and black), and Chatsworth Bluebirds (blue and orange). Prairie Central was selected as the name of the new consolidated school. The new mascot selected was the Hawks, and the new colors were white, Columbia blue, and navy.

Of course, Roger Wessels objected to the new school name and wrote letters to the Fairbury Blade and Bloomington Pantagraph editors. Roger complained that the Weston elevator was already named Prairie Central and that the school board should have selected a different name.

Although the consolidation involved many twists and turns, the resultant Prairie Central school system has dramatically benefited its students over the last twenty years. In 2004, the district was expanded further with the addition of the students from the former Chenoa High School.

HAWKS

CHAPTER 59

Miraculous Improvement in Corn Yields

The first farmers in the Fairbury area likely did not achieve long-term average corn yields of 30 bushels per acre. Many innovations over the years have increased long-term average corn yields to more than 200 bushels per acre.

Early farmers were plagued by flooding and standing water in their fields. The glaciers from 10,000 years ago made our farmland very flat, but there was no easy way for the rainwater to drain away. The introduction of clay tile in the 1880s changed our land from swampland to some of the most productive farmland on the planet.

One of the few known descriptions of farming methods in the 1800s is the Harper's Weekly magazine article Farming in the Great West in the September 23, 1871 issue. Michael Sullivant (1807-1879) bought 40,000 acres in what is now known as Sibley, Illinois. He named his massive farm Burr Oaks. Harper's Weekly did a story about Burr Oaks because, in 1871, it was the largest farm in the United States.

Mr. Sullivant first had to break the prairie with its natural vegetation. Teams of oxen were used to pull a breaking plow. This plow cut a furrow twenty inches in width. The primary purpose of this first pass was to turn over the sod and leave a furrow about three inches in depth. This ground was often immediately planted in corn. The first year's harvest would only be about 20 bushels per acre. If there were time to follow the breaking plow with a stirring plow, the first year's corn crop would increase to 45 bushels per acre. Every bushel of corn saved from the harvest was used to plant eight acres of corn the following season.

In that era, farmers saved some of their corn harvested in the Fall and planted it the following Spring. Mr. Sullivant's long-term corn yield was 45 bushels to the acre. He had to save one bushel of corn for every eight acres he had to plant the following season. In 1871, corn sold for about $.44 per bushel, equivalent to $11.38 per bushel in today's dollars.

Corn yields in the Fairbury area stayed at 45 bushels per acre from the 1870s until the 1930s. In the early 1900s, agricultural colleges like Iowa State University began experimenting and applying scientific principles to improve crop production.

Ears of corn are created when pollen released by the anthers in the top tassel area of the corn plant travels down and enters the corn silks. The wind or insects transfer the pollen. This process has occurred for thousands of years and is called open pollination. No pollen is produced if the tassel is removed, and nearby corn plants must provide the pollen.

Around 1910, experimental corn breeders became excited about improving corn yields by crossing two high-yielding varieties to produce hybrid seed corn. This idea was tested by planting the two different varieties in alternating rows and detasseling one of the varieties. This method of seed production proved to be disappointing and was abandoned.

This early research led to the idea of producing higher-yielding corn seeds by crossing two inbred lines. This idea was accomplished by planting a row of one inbred variety followed by several rows of a second variety. The tassels of the second variety were removed by hand so that the second variety could be pollinated by the first. This new idea was successful and stimulated further experimentation in producing higher-yielding corn seeds.

One of the most important men involved with improving corn yields was Henry Agard Wallace (1888-1965). He was born and raised on a farm in Iowa, and his father was a Professor of Dairying at Iowa State Agricultural College.

George Washington Carver (1864-1943) was an American agricultural scientist and inventor who promoted alternative crops to cotton and methods to prevent soil depletion. He was one of the most prominent black scientists of the early 20th Century. George Washington Carver was a student of Professor Wallace. Since Mr. Carver was barred from college housing because of his race, Professor Wallace invited him to live with him and his son, Henry A. Wallace. In exchange for the free housing, Mr. Carver tutored Henry A. Wallace in botany and plant breeding. Henry was

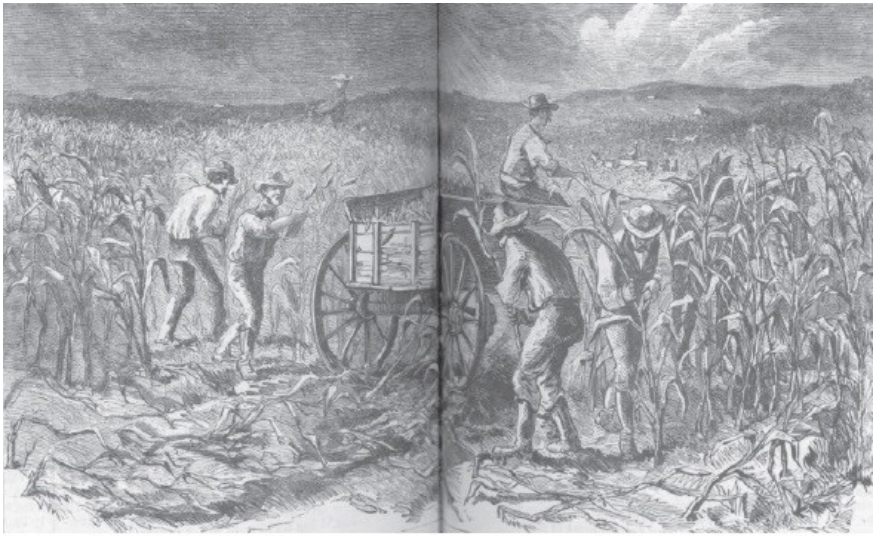
very interested in how plant breeding could be used to increase the production of corn, Iowa's biggest crop.

In that era, it was assumed the ears of corn that looked the best would produce the most significant yield. Henry A. Wallace devised an experiment that disproved this commonly held assumption. Henry A. Wallace and his wife purchased a farm near Johnston, Iowa, in 1914. They initially attempted to combine corn production with dairy farming but later focused on corn. Influenced by Edward Murray East, Wallace focused on producing hybrid corn and developing a variety called Copper Cross. In 1923, he reached the first-ever contract for hybrid seed production, agreeing to grant the Iowa Seed Company the sole right to grow and sell Copper Cross corn. In 1926, he co-founded the Hi-Bred Corn Company to develop and produce hybrid corn. It initially turned only a tiny profit but eventually became a massive financial success. Today, the company is one of the largest seed corn companies in the world and is known as Pioneer Hi Bred International.

Henry A. Wallace became the Secretary of Agriculture in 1933 in President Franklin Roosevelt's administration. He used his government position to promote using hybrid corn seed to improve national corn yields. Today, this would probably be considered a conflict of interest since Henry A. Wallace was one of the founders and owners of the largest hybrid seed corn company in the world. Henry A. Wallace also served as a Vice President to President Franklin D. Roosevelt from 1941 to 1945.

Besides tiling and hybrid seed corn, several other factors combined to increase corn yields in the 20th Century. Adopting internal combustion-powered tractors to replace horses meant corn could be planted more densely since the rows no longer had to be wide enough to accommodate a horse. Cheaply produced and plentiful nitrogen fertilizer also improved corn yields. Developing pesticides and insecticides was also an essential factor in enhancing corn yields.

The over four-fold increase in corn yields in the last 150 years has been a technological wonder. Corn yields will likely continue to increase as new technological innovations are developed.



Harvesting corn by hand on the Burr Oaks farm in 1871 in what is now Sibley, Illinois. Sketch from 1871 Harper's Weekly story on the largest farm at that time in the United States.

CHAPTER 60

Fond Memories of Iconic Drive-Inns

Many Fairbury residents fondly remember Harold's Drive-In, which later became Hap's Drive-Inn on the northeast corner of Eighth Street and Route 24. The story of these drive-ins goes back to a previous location at the southwest corner of Walnut and Fourth Streets, where the medical clinic is now located.

This location was where Fairbury's first hotel was built. After the hotel burned down, the Fairbury Tabernacle temporary building was constructed in 1914 for religious revival meetings. In the 1940s and 1950s, Andy Rapp and his wife operated an ice cream stand at that location. It was first called Andy's Ice Cream Parlor and later renamed Andy's Dairy Mart. Harvey Baer bought the ice cream stand from Andy Rapp.

In 1961, a new medical center building was constructed at the southwest corner of Walnut and Fourth Streets. Harvey Baer relocated his custard stand to the northeast corner of Eighth Street and Route 24 to make space for the new medical building.

Harvey Baer was born in Cropsey in 1927. He was the son of Henry Baer (1895-1928) and Julia Rieger (1898-1980). Unfortunately, Henry Baer died at the age of 33 when his son Harvey was just one year old. Henry had been ill for three months before his death. Henry's widow married Jacob John Aberle (1896-1961). Jacob and Julia Aberle had two sons, Richard Lloyd Aberle and Robert Aberle. Harvey Baer grew up with his two half-brothers, Richard and Robert Aberle.

Harvey Baer served in the U.S. Navy in World War II. In 1950, Harvey married Betty Darlene Foster in Pontiac. Harvey and Betty Baer had three daughters. In 1961, he moved his custard stand to the northeast corner of Eighth Street and Route 24. The same year, Harvey Baer sold it to Harold Hish.

In the 1960s, Harvey Baer owned and operated the IGA store in Fairbury. He then began selling insurance for the Equitable Life Insurance

Company. He eventually bought out the Bloomington agency and operated it for many years. Harvey Baer died in 2004 at the age of 77.

Harold Hish operated Harold's Drive-In from 1961 until 1972 when he sold it to Hap DeFries. Harold Hish was the son of Luther Embry Hish (1896-1970) and Hatta Pauline Buchner (1895-1983). Harold graduated from Fairbury Township High School in 1948. Harold married Jeanne Ethleen Poshard in 1948 at Cropsey. Harold and Jeanne Hish had three daughters.

In 1972, after operating Harold's Drive-In for 11 years, Harold Hish sold the restaurant to Hap DeFries. Harold Hish was a business entrepreneur. After selling his Fairbury drive-in, he owned businesses in Iowa, Colorado, Nevada, and Missouri. Late in life, he moved to Charlevoix, Michigan, to be closer to family. Harold Hish died in 2019 in Michigan at the age of 89.

Norton E. "Hap" DeFries was born in 1928 in Streator. He was the son of Henry DeFries and Margaret Norton. Hap DeFries married Barbara J. Steidinger in 1946. Hap and Barbara DeFries had three boys and one girl.

The father of N. E. "Hap" DeFries was Henry DeFries (1894-1958). In 1951, the Blade reported that Henry DeFries had resigned as the Fairbury Railway Express agent because of ill health. Henry DeFries started in the express business in 1928 in Minonk. On June 20, 1929, Henry DeFries came to Fairbury to replace James Goodrich. When Henry got to Fairbury, the express wagon was pulled by a horse. One month later, a motor-driven express wagon replaced the horse-drawn wagon.

Henry DeFries, also commonly called "Happy" or "Hap" DeFries, married Margaret Norton (1901-1991). Norton Edgar DeFries likely got his first name from his mother's maiden name.

Hap DeFries had many different occupations during his working career in Fairbury. He operated Hap's Drive-In from 1972 until around 1982. The address for the business was 600 E. Oak Street, and the phone number was 692-3125.

In 1974, Hugh Hefner's Playboy Magazine was trendy. As a marketing gimmick, Hap DeFries developed a "Plateboy" menu, a spoof on Playboy Magazine. He advertised that Plateboy was a chain of one restaurant, otherwise known as Hap's Drive-Inn. He advertised that the Plateboy menu had something for every family member.

In 1976, Hap placed an advertisement in the Pontiac Daily Leader for his hamburger basket. For 95 cents, the customer received a hamburger, French fries, and cole slaw. In today's dollars, the price of 95 cents would equal $5.17.

In December 1982, the Blade reported that Hap DeFries was an employee of Pittsburgh-International, a division of Pittsburgh Tube Company in Fairbury. Hap DeFries died in 2011 at the age of 82.

Initially, the drive-in had a kitchen room at the north end. The south end had only a roof, so cars could pull in and park under it. At some point, the roofed parking area was walled off and enclosed. The building still stands at the northeast corner of Eighth Street and Oak Street (Route 24).

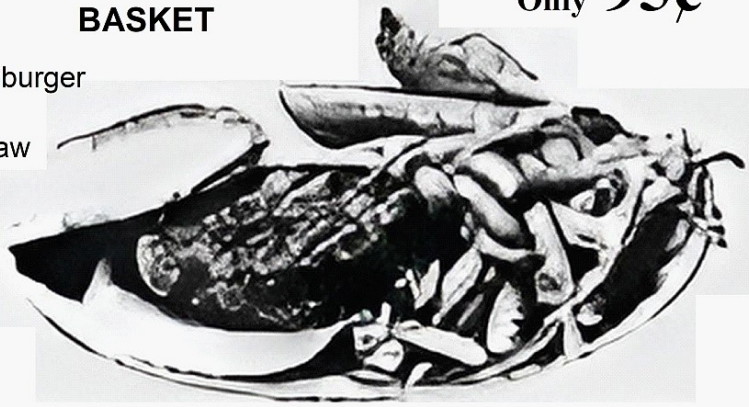
Many Fairbury area residents fondly remember eating at Harold's Drive-In or Hap's Drive-In. These two establishments served Fairbury customers for just over twenty years.

It's Less-than-a-dollar-day at HAP'S

HAMBURGER BASKET

Only **95¢**

Hamburger
F.F.
& Slaw



Cones°Sundaes°Shakes°Floats°Fried Pies
Ask about our SUNDAEBARS

HAP'S DRIVE-IN

(Air Cond. Seating for 60)

Rt. 24 E. (We are open Daily From 11-10) Fairbury

1976 Daily Leader ad for Hap's Drive-In

In March of 1974, Hap DeFries created this unique menu that imitated Playboy magazine. Inside the menu, he claimed Hap's Drive-In had food for every member of the family.

CHAPTER 61

Fairbury's Anti-Horse Thief Association

Living in the 21st Century, it is hard to comprehend how important horses were to everyday life in Fairbury. Farmers used teams of horses instead of tractors to plant and harvest their fields. Citizens living within the city limits of Fairbury kept horses in their small horse barns behind their houses and used them for daily transportation.

Today, there are only two new car dealers left in Fairbury. In the 1890s, many horse breeders and importers sold horses to farmers and city dwellers. Horses were some of the most valuable possessions farmers and city residents owned.

Shortly after the start of the Civil War, lawless men in the border states lying between the loyal and seceded states banded themselves together to plunder honest citizens. Missouri, especially, was subject to the depredations of these gangs, and in time, the conditions became so bad that the law-abiding people found it necessary to take some action for defense.

In 1863, the first society, the "Anti Horse Thief Association," was formed in Millport, Missouri. The effectiveness of such an organization quickly became apparent, and the order spread to other states. After the Civil War ended, the conditions that brought the association into existence no longer existed. The group expanded its scope to include all kinds of thefts and a national organization was incorporated under the laws of Kansas.

In November 1877, the Gibson-City Courier reported that the Anti-Horse Thief Association had 361 lodges and 8,000 members in Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois. The article reported that the organization did not encourage lynching, although that course is permitted in places where the officers of the law cannot be relied upon to prosecute thieves.

In 1884, Saybrook created their Anti-Horse Thief Association. In 1885, the Illinois State Legislature passed a new law empowering members of the anti-horse thief association to arrest parties suspected of having stolen property.

The March 1888 Gibson-City Courier reported the anti-horse thief associations in Illinois were planning a state convention in Champaign. The goal was to create a State Grand Association.

In 2010, the Pantagraph published a story about the Anti-Horse Thief associations. The story noted that in mid-October 1889, the Illinois associations held a grand annual meeting at Bloomington's Maennerchor Hall. The Pantagraph article reported there were about 3,000 members of the association in Illinois.

To quiet whispers (or outright accusations) of vigilantism, the society emphasized that thieves, once captured, were handed over to proper authorities. The 100-member Saybrook local chapter was one of the strongest in Central Illinois.

The Blade newspaper first mentioned a Fairbury chapter of the Anti-Horse Thief Association in August 1896. The Blade reported that the association would be serving ice cream to its members on Saturday. Tip Cox, the association's president, was scheduled to give a speech to the group.

One month later, the Pantagraph announced that the Pontiac Anti-Horse Thief Association had a picnic at Cumpston's Grove. There were speeches, music, and a big dinner.

The February 1897 Pantagraph reported that the Fairbury Anti-Horse Thief Association would be holding a parade and drill the next Saturday afternoon. Members would also have their pictures taken. About 100 members, including the Weston division, were expected to attend. The Pantagraph reported that persons expecting to steal horses are invited to examine the arms and muscles of the paraders.

On February 18, 1897, the Blade reported that the Fairbury Anti-Horse Thief Association had a parade of about 70 horsemen, and they made an imposing appearance. The gathering was in front of what is now old City Hall in Fairbury.

The Pantagraph also reported about the Fairbury parade and reported that the Fairbury Association was negotiating to buy a pair of bloodhounds to assist in tracking down thieves and bad men.

In 1898, the Blade reported that the Anti-Horse Thief Association was planning to hold an oyster supper at their hall the next Friday. The association's bloodhounds were going to hold a demonstration chase starting at 11 a.m.

The 1902 Blade reported the Anti-Horse Thief Association had voted to disband. The association voted to give the $40 in their treasury to the city to beautify Marsh Park.

In 1908, Henry Ford introduced his Model T automobile. It was the first car cheap enough for the average man to buy. Within a few years, all the horses in the city limits of Fairbury were replaced by automobiles. Farmers held onto their horses until the 1940s when they were all replaced by internal combustion engine-powered tractors.

In September 1925, the Blade first printed a copy of the large Fairbury Anti-Horse Thief Association parade held back in 1897.

In 1976, Jim Roberts, Editor of the Blade, reported the Blade's copy of this 1897 iconic photo was stained and in bad shape. He asked readers if they had a better copy of this photo.

In 2023, someone graciously donated their family's copy of the iconic 1897 photo to the Fairbury Echoes Museum. The Association members were on horseback in front of Walton's Department Store. One member holds a sign that says, "Fairbury, No. 198, A.H.T.A). The acronym for the Anti-Horse Thief Association was A.H.T.A.

The fascinating story of the Fairbury Anti-Horse Thief Association reminds us of an earlier era when horses were some of the most essential possessions of farmers and city dwellers.

1897 gathering of the Fairbury Anti-Horse Thief Association at the northwest corner of Third and Locust Streets.

CHAPTER 62

Gerber Family Was Farming and Banking Family

The Gerber family has been an essential part of the Fairbury farming and banking community for several generations. The story started with John Gerber's birth in Langnau, Switzerland. Around 1847, he married Mathilda Zimmerman from Stuttgart, Germany. She was 37 years old when she married John Gerber. They emigrated to Rittman, Ohio, about 20 miles southwest of Akron. John and Mathilda Gerber had five children.

In 1853, John and Mathilda Gerber moved their family to West Bend, Iowa. John Gerber's father, John M. Gerber (1803-1879), and his wife, Elizabeth Steiner (1812-1855), were already living in West Bend. John Gerber was expecting his father to meet them when they arrived, but he was not there. John Gerber left his sick wife and five children with friends in West Bend. His two young boys wanted to go with him to find their grandfather. John Gerber told the boys they could not go with him, but he would return soon after he found his father.

Unfortunately, while he was walking looking for his father, John Gerber died in 1853 in Iowa. His friends placed his body in a homemade "casket of the box." His five children were told not to tell their mother about their father's death because she was too sick. One of the boys, five-year-old John Gerber Sr., peaked into the room where his father's body was in the casket. This young boy never forgot the sight of seeing his father for the last time.

The Gerber family moved to Morton, Illinois, in the late 1860s or early 1870s. One daughter married, but the other two daughters never married. Both sons married.

One of the sons, Christian Gerber, married Barbara Roth in Peoria, Illinois, in 1872. He was 23, and she was 24 when they married. Christian and Barbara Roth had six children. Unfortunately, two of the six children died

as children. Daniel Gerber died in March 1880 when he was six years old, and Joseph Gerber died in December 1880 when he was two years old.

Two daughters never married. Anna Gerber died in Fairbury at the age of 76. Lydia Gerber died in Fairbury at the age of 100. Katherine "Katie" Gerber married Peter Schaffer Sr. (1883-1968). They had eight children. She died in 1978 at the age of 92.

In 1875, Rev. Gerber and his family moved from Morton to Belle Prairie Township, south of Fairbury. According to Benjamin Nussbaum's South Side Apostolic Christian Church history pamphlet, the original ministers of the South Side church were Rudolph Leuthold, Peter Sommer, Nick Wanner, Henry Ziegenhorn, and Christian Gerber.

In 1910, at the age of 62, Rev. Gerber was working in his hayfield. He was walking and driving the head team of horses hitched to a hay loader. John Hoerr, who was working with the hay loader, noticed the absence of Rev. Gerber. The horse team went by, and Mr. Hoerr saw the horse lines were dragging on the ground. Mr. Hoerr then noticed that Rev. Gerber had fallen to the ground. In just a few more minutes, Rev. Gerber passed away.

In 1914, Chris S. Gerber, son of Christian and Barbara Gerber, married Laura M. Yoder. He was 26, and she was 24. Chris and Laura Gerber had eight children and farmed south of Fairbury. In 1912, Chris Gerber built the first round barn in the area on his farm about eight miles south of Fairbury. The round barn burned down in 1957. Chris S. Gerber died in 1971 at the age of 83.

In 1873, John Gerber, the other son of Christian and Barbara Gerber, married Mary "Marie" Falb in Iowa. He was 24, and she was 18 when they married. John and Marie Gerber had 15 children. Unfortunately, five of these children died before they were 11.

One of the 15 children of John and Marie Gerber was Joseph Gerber (1884-1955). Joseph married Irene M. Yoder in 1907. He was 23, and she was 21 when they married. Irene Yoder was Laura Yoder's sister. The two sisters married first cousins Chris S. Gerber and John Gerber. Joseph and Irene Gerber had three children.

Joseph Gerber initially worked in the insurance and real estate field. In 1918, he helped found the Farmers State Bank in Fairbury, which later became the Farmers National Bank. At the time of his death in 1955, he was President of the Farmers National Bank.

Joseph Gerber served as a Fairbury alderman and then became the Mayor from 1923 to 1925. During his tenure, many streets were paved, and drainage systems were installed. Mr. Gerber was a member of the Board of Education, active with the Boy Scouts, and a charter member of the Rotary Club. He was 71 when he died.

Gladys L. Gerber, daughter of Joseph and Irene Gerber, never married and died in Fairbury in 2009 at the age of 99. Velda Mardelle Gerber, the other daughter of Joseph and Irene Gerber, married William J. Redlich. She died in 2005 at the age of 82.

John Wayne Gerber, the only son of Joseph and Irene Gerber, was born in 1911. John W. Gerber graduated from Fairbury Township High School in 1929. He then attended the University of Illinois. Mr. Gerber then graduated from the University of Banking School in Madison, Wisconsin. He later graduated from the Executive Banking School at Harvard University.

John W. Gerber started working for his father, Joseph Gerber, in 1930 at the Farmers State Bank. He married Helen Theodora Olson in 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota. He was 29, and she was 26 when they married. Helen had graduated from St. Luke's Hospital nurses program in Duluth and worked as a surgical nurse until she married John W. Gerber. John and Helen Gerber had four children.

When Joseph Gerber died in 1955, John W. Gerber became the President and Chairman of the board for Farmers National Bank and changed its name to Bluestem National Bank.

Warren Olson, born in 1935, was a brother to Helen Gerber. He was in the banking business and graduated from the Banking School in Southern Illinois. Warren took a job working for his brother-in-law, John W. Gerber. In 1964, Warren Olson married Peg Vaughan in Fairbury. Warren

Olson eventually became a Bank Director, and he died in 2010 at the age of 75.

J.W. "Bud" Gerber, son of John W. Gerber, continued the family banking tradition at the Bluestem National Bank, which was sold to the Bank of Pontiac in 2012.

For many generations, the Gerber family has played an essential role in Fairbury's farming and banking community.

Joseph Gerber (1884-1955) motoring around in Fairbury in his 1911 automobile.

CHAPTER 63

First Surveys of Fairbury Area Townships

The three primary townships in the Fairbury area are Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie. Before the first settlers could purchase land from the federal government, it had to be surveyed.

The same surveying crew conducted the initial surveys of Indian Grove and Avoca Townships, while a different crew surveyed the Belle Prairie township.

The records of these first surveys still exist, and they are in two different sets of documents. The surveying crew drew an original survey map for each township. These original survey maps for Livingston County townships are readily available online.

In addition to the survey map, each survey crew was required to make a log book called the Surveyor's Notes. These log books are also available from the National Archives website.

The original survey maps for Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie townships were done in the 1830s. The first settlers in Livingston County were Valentine and Rachel Darnall, south of Fairbury, in 1830. The McDowell family arrived in 1832 and settled north of Fairbury near the Avoca Cemetery. Very few families lived in the area, and there were no official roads when the surveys were done.

It is a tedious task to find the 31 pages that make up the Surveyor's Notes for the first survey of Avoca Township because of how they were reordered and then computerized. They are written in longhand and have not been transcribed to text.

Enoch Moore was the Deputy Surveyor for the crew that surveyed Avoca Township. He did some preliminary survey work in October of 1833. His crew did a detailed survey of Avoca Township that started on May 13, 1834, and concluded on May 31, 1834.

James B. Moore was the flag man for this crew, which also included a "fore chain man," chain man, and axe man. The crew surveyed Avoca Township for about three weeks.

Each township is six miles by six miles or 36 square miles. It is divided into 36 sections, each numbered from one to thirty-six. A section is one square mile and contains 640 acres. The surveying crew used wood stakes to mark the boundaries of each quarter section, which was 160 acres.

To mark each boundary point, the crew buried two quarts of charcoal at least three inches below the ground. They then made a dirt mound and drove a stake into the mound. If the wood stake decayed or got lost, the charcoal would mark the location for many decades after the survey was performed.
To measure distances, the surveying crew used a lightweight chain that was 66 feet long with 100 chain links. Each link was heavy gauge wire just over nine inches long. They chose to use a 66-foot chain because half- and quarter-sections of land work out to be an even number of 66-foot-long chains. For example, one mile is 80 chain lengths, a half-mile is 40, and a quarter-mile is 20.

Because this lightweight chain could be damaged, each working chain was periodically checked against a "master chain." In several cases, when surveying Avoca Township, a working chain was checked and found to be one-half inch off in length. The crew adjusted the working chain to match the exact length of the master chain.

If the surveying crew had to measure across a creek or river, they measured and noted how wide the water was. For example, the Vermilion River was 100 chain links wide at one point. This number of chain lengths is equivalent to 66 feet wide.

In the 1830s, timber was growing along the creeks and rivers. The surveying crew noted the timber type in a township section. The tree types they noted were oak, hickory, burr oak, hackberry, linn, buckeye, elm, sugar tree, black oak, walnut, ash, white oak, and mulberry. Today, a linn tree is usually called an American Basswood species.

The surveying crew also noted the nature of the land they were surveying. In Avoca Township, they used two choices. The first choice was "rich prairie fit for cultivation." The second choice was "level rich prairie but too wet for cultivation."

Much of the farmland in our area was swampy in the 1830s because there was no easy way for the water to drain off the flat land. Clay field tile were introduced in the 1880s and changed the swampland into some of the most productive farmland on the planet.

There were no official roads in the 1830s. After the land was purchased and farmed, the boundaries of most sections became roads. The Avoca Township surveying crew made two notations of two roads in the township. These were likely trails used to travel to a ford across the Vermilion River.

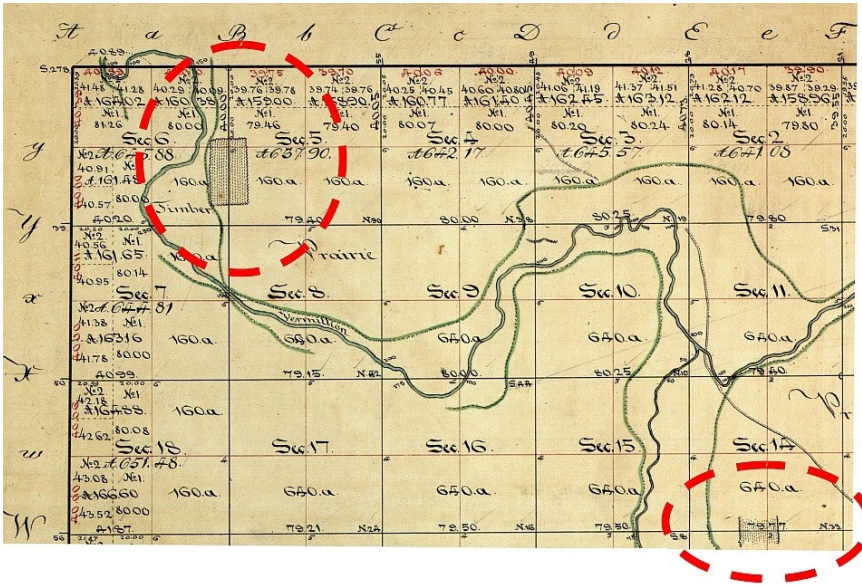
The first survey map of Avoca Township used two rectangular symbols. Unfortunately, no legends on these maps explain what the symbols mean. One is in the northwest corner of the township, close to the village of McDowell. The second rectangular symbol is in the vicinity of the Avoca Cemetery.

The surveying crew noted in their Surveyor's Notes that both rectangular areas were existing corn fields. 1840, after it was surveyed, William G. and Benjamin Hubbard purchased the land with the corn field close to McDowell from the federal government. Mr. William G. Hubbard was a pioneer settler in the McDowell area.

The land with the corn field near the Avoca Cemetery was on the southwest quarter of Section 14. Sarah McDowell purchased this quarter-section of land from the federal government in 1840, paying cash for it. She was part of the pioneer McDowell family that settled north of Fairbury in 1832.

The combination of the original surveyor's maps and their associated Surveyor's Notes is a valuable resource for learning about the history of our area. Except for the two small corn fields, Avoca Township was a virgin prairie with timber growing along the creeks and rivers back in 1834. To understand what this prairie might have looked like to the early

surveyors, one can visit the Weston Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve on Route 24 between Weston and Fairbury. The Weston Cemetery is one of the few places in Illinois with natural prairie vegetation.



The original surveyors of Avoca Township showed two rectangular grids on their survey map. Their surveyor notes indicated these were existing corn fields they found when they did the survey. The northwest corn field was near the present day village of McDowell. The southeast corn field was near the present day Avoca Cemetery.

CHAPTER 64

Local Woman Helped to Design First Atomic Bomb

World War II was brought to an end in 1945 when the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A young woman from Livingston County played a crucial role in the development of these nuclear bombs.

The Ewing family's story began with William McCord Ewing's birth in 1879 in Pontiac. William married Sarah Lovelock in Pontiac. When they married, William was 37, and Sarah was 27. They had five girls named Frances Eleanor, Marjorie H., Mary Elizabeth, Barbara Joan, and June Ewing. William Ewing farmed east of Pontiac on Route 116.

The oldest daughter of William and Sarah Ewing was Frances "Eleanor" Ewing. She was born in 1918 in Pontiac. Eleanor attended and graduated from Pontiac High School, where she discovered she had a knack for mathematics.

When Eleanor graduated from Pontiac High School in 1937, Assistant Principal Wayne Eckley helped her get admitted to the University of Illinois mathematics program. Eleanor graduated with a B.A. in Mathematics in 1941. She then pursued an M.A. in Mathematics at the University of Illinois while teaching in the mathematics department.

Naomi Livesay received a PhD in Mathematics from the University of Wisconsin in 1939. She then got a job at Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs. During this time, Livesay was sent to Philadelphia to complete a training course in operating and programming IBM electric calculating machines. For six months, with the help of an assistant, Livesay designed and implemented plug-board programs, punched cards, and carried cards over from one machine to another.

Naomi changed jobs and became an instructor at the University of Illinois. While at the University of Illinois, Livesay became friends with fellow instructor Eleanor Ewing.

During the fall of 1943, Livesay got a letter from Joseph Hirschfelder, an American physicist, offering her a job working on a "war project." After her security clearance was approved, she left for Los Alamos in February 1944. Hirschfelder's group had been working on the gun model for plutonium, but by the time Livesay arrived in Los Alamos, that project had been terminated. However, Livesay was asked by Richard Feynman to stick around and to work with another theoretical group to calculate the predicted shock wave from an implosion-type bomb. Since this group would be using IBM machines, Livesay was an extremely qualified and ideal candidate. Her position involved supervising the crew that kept the IBM machines running 24 hours a day and performing hand calculations to check for any errors made by the machines.

In 1944, Eleanor Ewing, a graduate of Pontiac High School and the University of Illinois, worked in Hartford, Connecticut. She received a phone call from Naomi Livesay, who had taught math with her at the University of Illinois. "I want you to come to New Mexico," Miss Livesay said. "We need you." Miss Livesay would not say where she was, would answer no questions, and asked for an instant decision from Miss Ewing. Because Eleanor knew and trusted Naomi Livesay, she agreed to go to New Mexico.

Miss Ewing was told to say goodbye to no one. A train ticket to Chicago came in the mail from the War Department with instructions to go to Western Union at 10 p.m. for further orders and another ticket.

She also was told to destroy all instructions received after she had absorbed their contents. When she attempted to board the train, an MP told her, "No women on this train, kid." But he let her through after she produced her War Department letter.

Being the only woman on the train and being instructed to keep her name, profession, and destination from everyone made this a rather unpleasant trip for a young lady with long, bright red hair. The train ended at Lamy, New Mexico, a train station in the middle of the desert.

"You're getting off here," the conductor said, and Eleanor and her luggage were put off the train. She recalled thinking, "I hope I see my mother again."

Miss Livesay arrived in an Army car and took her to Santa Fe but would say nothing about what was coming. She took Eleanor to an office on East Palace Ave. with no name on the door or anywhere else. They picked up passes, drove about 30 or 40 miles onto the 7,200-foot Los Alamos mesa, stopped at an Army gate, and were motioned on.

Miss Livesay took Eleanor to an office in the technical area and left her alone while she went to get two men.

The men closed the room's door and pulled the shades. One of them leaned down and whispered in Eleanor's ear: "Eleanor, you're brought here to make an atomic bomb."

After a short briefing session, they wrote some equations on a board and erased them.

"I got panicky," Eleanor said later because I wasn't sure I knew enough physics to work with the atom."

She had had only one physics course in her life, one of Professor John Manley's courses at the U. of I., where she was the only female in a class of 101 students.

At a meal soon after her arrival, Eleanor found herself chatting with two men — Nobel laureate Neils Bohr and Otto Frisch, early developers of the idea of nuclear fission.

Her work settled into a routine after her August 1944 arrival. She and Miss Livesay supervised 12 to 14 men using IBM machines to solve the equations necessary to build the bomb.

Eleanor spent her free time dating Richard Ehrlich, who was working in the theoretical division of the project. Eleanor and Richard Ehrlich were married on July 7, 1945. It was the last wedding at Los Alamos before the

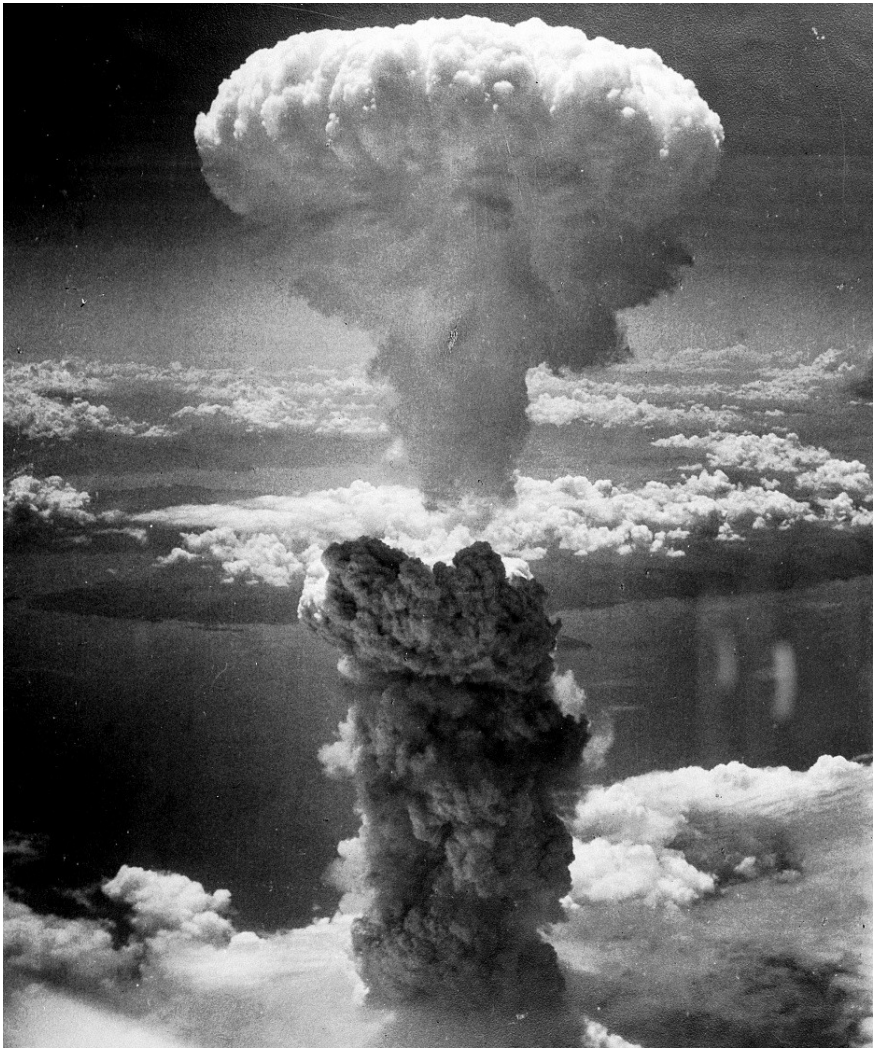
first test of the atomic bomb. The first test was called Trinity and was successful on July 16, 1945. Almost 4,000 people had worked on this project for 28 months, starting in early 1943. Of the 365 scientists who worked on the bomb, fewer than 10 were women.

On August 6 and August 9, 1945, the United States detonated two atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively. World War II ended a few days later when Japan surrendered.

The July 2, 1977, edition of the Pontiac Daily Leader published an interview they did with Mrs. Eleanor Ehrlich. In this interview, Eleanor said she had no regrets about working on the bomb. "I think that was part of the war. I regret that there are wars, but in those times, I was working with individuals whose families had been exterminated in Germany, Poland, and Hungary. They were my best friends. And I knew young men — my classmates who were lost at Pearl Harbor and Bataan."

Mrs. Ehrlich says she remembered what Pontiac High School did for her. Teachers there made her realize she was intelligent, and one teacher, Wayne Eckley, she credits with getting her into the U. of I. from which she developed the contacts that got her into the A-bomb work.

Eleanor Ehrlich died in 2011 in Saratoga, Florida, at the age of 92. She was a pioneer in mathematics and computing and was part of a team of 365 scientists who developed the atomic bomb, which ended World War II.



Mushroom shaped cloud from atomic bombing of Nagasaki in 1945.

CHAPTER 65

100th Anniversary for Livingston County Historical Society

The year 2024 marks the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Livingston County Historical Society in 1924. The primary impetus for the Society's formation was a moving speech Henry J. Mies (1869-1932) gave to the Kiwanis Club of Pontiac.

Mr. Mies was a farmer in the Saunemin area. His many interests included history, geology, glass plate photography, and collecting Native American artifacts in Livingston County.

The father of Mr. Mies was Joseph Mies (1834-1900). Although Joseph Mies' family was impoverished in Germany, his father supported Joseph's two and half years of schooling as a master carpenter. Joseph emigrated from Germany to America and led a fascinating life. Joseph worked as a Michigan pine forest lumberjack, a South African copper miner, a gold miner in Australia, served in the Civil War, helped build the Transcontinental Railroad, and became a pioneer farmer in Livingston County.

In 1924, Mr. Mies gave a 3,123-word fascinating speech about Native American history and artifacts. A copy of his speech to the Kiwanis Club still exists, and it is still a fascinating speech 100 years after he first wrote it.

One of the Society's first significant accomplishments was designing, creating, and placing a memorial dedicated to honoring the City of Pontiac's namesake. On Saturday, September 29, 1936, an arrowhead-shaped monument was unveiled on the Livingston County Court House grounds. The memorial is dedicated to the famous Ottawa war chief, Pontiac. The stones used in the edifice were gathered locally, and the bronze plaques were cast at the Pontiac Reformatory. This memorial still exists and is located on the southeast corner of the old courthouse.

1930 marked the 100th anniversary of Valentine and Rachel Darnall being the first white settlers in Livingston County. The Historical Society organized a significant celebration event at the Spence Farm south of Fairbury. Henry Mies took glass plate photographs of this event.

1937 marked the 100th anniversary of Livingston County's formation. The Historical Society played a very active role in helping to celebrate this milestone. Unfortunately, after 12 years of existence, the Historical Society went dormant after the celebrations for this event were concluded.

In 1963, after being dormant for 26 years, Mr. Tuesburg and Mr. J. Paul Yost revived the Society. The recruitment of two key county historians also helped revive the Society.

Mrs. Louise Stoutemyer (1905-1993) was a Chatsworth school teacher who was interested in Chatsworth area history. She helped save a Chatsworth country school, and the Chatsworth Little School Museum is now in downtown Chatsworth. Louise also wrote ***The Train that Never Arrived***, a book about the famous 1887 Chatsworth train wreck.

Mrs. Alma Lewis James (1899-1979) was a Fairbury historian. Her most famous book about Fairbury history was ***Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars***, first published in 1967.

Through the efforts of Mrs. Stoutemyer, Mrs. Alma Lewis James, various Pontiac people, and other key people throughout the County, the Historical Society was revived in 1963 and has been very active over the following 60 years.

Over the years, many Livingston County residents have graciously donated historical artifacts to the Society. Some of these artifacts are on permanent display in a 420-square-foot room on the first floor of the Old Courthouse in Pontiac. Approximately 500 other artifacts are carefully preserved in the Society's archive collection.

In the late 1970s, the Jones House at 314 E. Madison Street in Pontiac became the first house owned and refurbished by the Society. It is the oldest brick home in Pontiac and was placed on the National Register of

Historic Places in 1978. Two prominent families, the Dehner and Jones families, lived in this house.

For many decades, the Yost House at 298 W. Water Street was the art and cultural center of Pontiac and Livingston County. The three Yost children who lived in the home were involved in plays, painting, book reviews, and music. The last surviving Yost child, J. Paul Yost, died in 1988. Mr. Yost bequeathed the Yost House to the City of Pontiac. The Historical Society provides docents and tours of this historic home.

The Historical Society's last major property acquisition was the Strevell House in 2008. In January 1860, Abraham Lincoln spent an afternoon and evening at this home at 401 W. Livingston Street. While he was visiting, his height of 6 feet 4 inches was measured with a ruler and marked on a doorway. Many individuals and businesses completed the renovation of this historic home in 2018. The Strevell House was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2023.

The Historical Society provides free public tours of the three historic homes monthly, usually on the third Saturday from 1 to 3 p.m. Highly trained docents conduct the tours and provide detailed information about each home.

The Livingston County Historical Society currently has about 70 members, who live in various communities in Livingston County. The Society meets eight times a year, usually on the third Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Strevell House. At each meeting, a guest speaker provides a presentation about a local history-related topic. The meetings are free of charge and open to the general public. You do not have to be a member to attend a meeting and listen to the guest presenter.

If you have a Livingston County-related item you would like to donate to the Historical Society, call 815-692-6633 to discuss it. You may also contact the same number if you would like to volunteer or join the Historical Society. House tours and other information are posted on the Historical Society's Facebook page.

In this digital age, over 200 rare documents have been scanned and uploaded to the Archive.Org website. Anyone can search for these documents for free and find them to view or download.

The year 2037 will mark the next major milestone in Livingston County history: the 200th anniversary of its founding in 1837. The Livingston County Historical Society plans to continue to be active and participate in the 2037 celebrations.

Two young Pontiac ladies enjoying a buggy ride in Pontiac in the early 1900s. The Pontiac City Hall and Fire station in the background was built in 1900. One of the rare documents held in the archives of the Livingston County Historical Society. Software was used to colorize the old black & white photo.

CHAPTER 66

Fairbury's Worst Auto Accident Occurred 64 Years Ago

In terms of fatalities, the worst automobile accident in the Fairbury area occurred in 1960 when five of the six members of the Dewey family were killed on Route 24 west of Fairbury.

The story of the Dewey family began with the birth of Ellis Laverne Dewey in 1923 in Des Moines, Iowa. His parents were Max Earl Dewey and Nellie O'Connell. Ellis attended local schools and was involved in a car accident in Des Moines when he was 16 years old in 1939. Ellis Dewey was driving a car with the two young daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Zavatsky in the front seat. As Ellis approached the intersection of Fleur Drive and McKinley Avenue, one mile south of Des Moines city limits, he rear-ended a car driven by Floyd Kamber. The vehicle of Kamber was shoved into a ditch. Mr. Kamber suffered a broken leg and internal injuries. Young Ellis Dewey and his two young girl passengers each suffered minor injuries.

Ellis Dewey graduated from North High School in Des Moines. After finishing high school, Ellis attended and graduated from Iowa State University and the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.

Doris Arlene Reeck was also born and raised in the Des Moines area. She also attended and graduated from North High School in Des Moines. Doris married Ellis Dewey in 1945 when he was still finishing his college education at Iowa State University. Ellis got a job in Cincinnati, Ohio, working for the food equipment division of Proctor & Gamble Corporation.

The first of Ellis and Doris Dewey's four children, Daniel D. Dewey, was born in 1950. In 1952, daughter Deborah L. Dewey was born. In 1951, Ellis and Doris Dewey bought a building lot in the Cincinnati area and took possession of a new five-bedroom home in East Covedale Park. In 1955, daughter Laura Dewey was born. Donald D. Dewey was born in

1958. Ellis Dewey was promoted to Associate Director of Engineering for the food equipment division of Proctor & Gamble.

In July 1960, John Sutter Sr. (1873-1964) was an 86-year-old farmer living southwest of Fairbury. His driver's license was restricted because it required that he wear eyeglasses while driving. Paul Zorn (1900-1987) was a 60-year-old truck driver who lived in Forest, Illinois.

The Ellis Dewey family bought a new station wagon and a house trailer or camper. In that era, cars did not have any of the safety features of today's automobiles. For example, today's autos are all crash-tested to improve the probability that occupants can survive a crash. The Dewey's new station wagon had no seat belts and no airbags. It also had no child restraint seats.

The Dewey's decided to take a family vacation to Yellowstone National Park. On their return trip home, they stopped in Des Moines, Iowa, on Saturday, July 9th, 1960, to visit their relatives. After spending the weekend in Des Moines, the Dewey family left at 4 PM on Monday, July 11th, to resume their trip home. They spent Monday night in the camper they were towing behind the station wagon.

On Tuesday morning, July 12th, 1960, the family loaded into the station wagon and started driving east on Route 24 towards Cincinnati, Ohio, their final destination. Driving behind the Dewey family was Jerry Gross, a member of the U.S. Navy.

As they approached the McLean and Livingston County Line three miles west of Fairbury, Jerry Gross watched a horrific scene unfold before his eyes. First, Jerry saw the car driven by 86-year-old John Sutter Sr. approaching the Route 24 intersection on a gravel road from the south. Mr. Gross observed that the vehicle did not stop when it reached the intersection. Instead, Mr. Sutter turned right onto Route 24 and headed east towards Fairbury.

Ellis Dewey, driving the station wagon with his wife and four children, had to make a quick decision. His choice was to rear-end the car driven by John Sutter Sr. in front of him or swerve to the left lane. Ellis Dewey decided to veer into the left lane. Unfortunately, in that lane was a two-ton dump truck driven by Paul Zorn heading west on Route 24. A horrific

high-speed head-on collision occurred between the station wagon and the dump truck. John Sutter Sr. heard the loud noise from the horrendous crash and stopped his car along Route 24.

Three of the Dewey family were immediately killed in the head-on collision. They were Ellis Dewey, 37; his wife, Arlene, 36, and their son Daniel, 10. Two daughters, Deborah, 8, and Laura, 5, died soon after they arrived at the Fairbury Hospital. The fourth child, Donald, age two, was taken to the Fairbury Hospital and was initially in critical condition. Paul Zorn, the driver of the dump truck, suffered injuries and was taken to the Fairbury Hospital. Mr. Zorn recovered from his injuries. John Sutter Sr. sustained no injuries, and his car had no damage.

A wrecker crew was called to remove the station wagon, the camper, and the dump truck. The station wagon was utterly demolished. The wrecker crew recounted the only other time they had seen a car so mangled was in a train and automobile collision.

The condition of the only survivor of the Dewey family, little two-and-half-year-old Donald Dewey, was touch and go at the Fairbury Hospital. The nursing staff provided around-the-clock monitoring of the little boy. His condition improved within a couple of days. His aunt, Mrs. A. L. Wensel, traveled from Des Moines to the Fairbury Hospital to monitor the progress of Donald Dewey. After his condition had improved, Mrs. Wensel hired an air ambulance plane to fly little Donald Dewey back to Des Moines. The aircraft used the Honegger's airfield in Forrest to land and take off. Mrs. Wensel eventually legally adopted Donald Dewey.

In terms of fatalities, this terrible accident was the worst that ever occurred in Fairbury's history. In the blink of an eye, the lives of five of the six Dewey family members were snuffed out. Several members of the Fairbury Hospital nursing staff that helped little two-year-old Donald Dewey recover still remember that horrible accident.

Typical 1960 station wagon like the one the Dewey family was using on their vacation in 1960. It had no seat belts, no air bags, and no child restraint seats. They were also towing a camper behind the car.

CHAPTER 67

Prairie Lands Foundation Has Been Great for Fairbury

Over the last 40 years, the Prairie Lands Foundation has been involved with many projects that have improved the quality of life for Fairbury area citizens.

In the late 1970s, a Fairbury family wanted to donate money to a non-profit organization that would use the funds to improve Fairbury. Because no such non-profit group existed in Fairbury, the family gave the money to an adjacent community. Some Fairbury civic leaders realized Fairbury needed a non-profit organization that could use locally donated funds to improve the community.

The first swimming pool in Fairbury was built in 1958 by the Fairbury Swimming Pool Association. By 1980, however, it began experiencing high annual repair costs.

In 1981, the directors of the Swimming Pool Association formed a special study group. This group met with Peoria attorney William Rutherford. Mr. Rutherford was the driving member of the Peoria Forest Park Foundation, which had generated millions of dollars in benefits for the Peoria area. As a result of the study, the Fairbury Community Swimming Pool Association changed its name to the Prairie Lands Foundation. They decided to expand their scope beyond just the swimming pool to other civic benefits.

In late 1981, The Nature Conservancy bought an unused section of railroad track from the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad for $24,000. The 12-acre site would become the Sunbury Railroad Prairie. It was a 100-foot wide strip of land nine miles west and just south of Dwight on Illinois 17, about 15 miles north of Pontiac. After the land purchase, the Fairbury-Forrest Nature Club and Prairie Lands Foundation paid back the $24,000 to the Nature Conservancy. Prairie Lands Foundation eventually took ownership of the site and turned it into a nature education area.

In 1982, Marion Stafford donated 177 acres of farmland in Avoca Township to the Prairie Lands Foundation. She stipulated that the proceeds from selling the land be used to construct a new swimming pool and community center. Prairie Lands Foundation sold the property for $504,450 in 1982. The Fairbury firm of Stoller & Maurer was hired to design the new building complex, which would be named the Floyd and Marion Stafford Community Center. The new pool was completed in 1983.

At the 1989 annual meeting of the Prairie Lands Foundation, Jim Paternoster reported they had received $75,000 from the estate of Gertrude Brady. William and Gertrude Brady spent most of their lives in the Forrest and Fairbury area. They operated a dairy farm west of Forrest for many years and delivered milk in Forrest. After retiring from the farm, they purchased a home in Fairbury. Jim Paternoster reported the foundation had total cash assets of $144,000.

In August of 1989, John P. Wade died. He owned Keck's Insurance Agency from 1962 to 1977. John was a charter member of the Prairie Lands Foundation. He and his wife, Tula Wade, left 75% of their estate to Prairie Lands Foundation.

In 1997, the Prairie Lands Foundation began investigating how a new park could be built on North First Street. It was discovered the City of Fairbury could apply for a $212,500 grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources if they could match the amount with local funds. Prairie Lands Foundation and the city devised a solution that did not involve Fairbury taxpayer funds. Prairie Lands Foundation donated the swimming pool to the City of Fairbury to come up with local matching funding. This plan satisfied the State of Illinois, and plans to build the new park began.

Marion Stafford donated $170,000 to pay for the walking trail at North Park. The city got another matching state grant so the trail could be expanded to run from the swimming pool to Prairie Central High School.

In October 2001, Howard and Bernadine Fugate of Fairbury donated 120 acres of family farmland and timberland to the Prairie Lands Foundation. Eighty acres of the land were timber, which would be the heart of the

recreation area. The remaining 40 acres would generate income to support the new recreation area.

Prairie Lands Foundation officials called this gift a "phenomenal" boost to the foundation's civic and conservation efforts. A board member, Jim Paternoster (1942-2022), recounted, "This is the type of gift we envisioned when we created the Prairie Lands Foundation in 1981." Paternoster also recounted that the Prairie Lands Foundation had always been interested in acquiring timberland near Fairbury to develop into a recreational area and nature center. Paternoster stated, "This gift was just perfect."

The new screened-in pavilion at North Park was dedicated in 2004. It was made possible through generous gifts from the Marion McDowell Stafford Charitable Trust and the John and Tula Wade Endowment Fund.

In 2012, the Dominy Memorial Library was raising funds for a significant expansion project. Prairie Lands Foundation offered to match the first $25,000 in donations to the Dominy Memorial Library building fund. The matching funds came from an endowment fund bequeathed to Prairie Lands Foundation by John and Tula Wade.

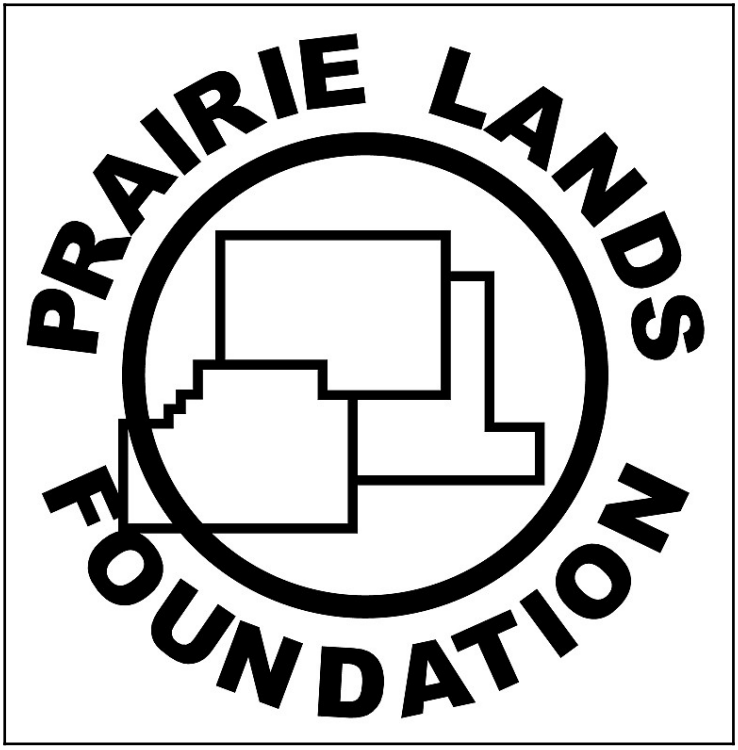
Also, in 2012, SELCAS raised money for its new building. Prairie Lands Foundation offered to match the first $15,000 in donations for the South East Livingston County Ambulance Service (SELCAS) building fund. The matching funds came from the endowment fund bequeathed to Prairie Lands Foundation by John and Tula Wade.

In 2016, the Prairie Lands Foundation began funding various projects for the Fairbury Improvement Group. Their first project was the design and installation of five historic murals in Veterans Memorial Park (formerly Central Park). The second project was re-painting the historic Occident Flour building advertising sign at the northeast corner of Locust and Second Streets. Eventually, the old Archer House and Swing & Steidinger signs were refurbished on Locust Street.

In 2017, the Fairbury Improvement Group undertook its most significant project, the refurbishment of Marsh Park. The Prairie Lands Foundation was the primary financial contributor to this project.

Also, in 2017, Prairie Lands Foundation received a donation of acreage to develop Conrad and Catherine Munz Memorial Park. Mary Orth donated funds to add to the existing walking trail. The William H. Orth Memorial Walking Trail extended the path along the west side of Indian Creek.

For over 40 years, Prairie Lands Foundation has accepted gifts from local citizens and converted the funds into Fairbury quality of life improvements. Only a few towns with a population of 3,800 can boast six public parks, a swimming pool, a modern library, miles of walking trails, and nature preserves. Many thanks are owed to the many people who donated to Prairie Lands Foundation and the skill of the trustees in wisely spending those funds to improve the quality of life for Fairbury citizens.



CHAPTER 68

Purdum's Were Early Fairbury Businessmen

For over seven decades, the Purdums were involved with Fairbury businesses, including a motorcycle dealership, an auto dealership, a grocery store, and a life insurance agency. The story of the Purdum family began with the birth of John Wesley Purdum in 1819 in Brown County, Ohio. In 1839, J. W. Purdum married Nancy Ann Hamilton. He was 19, and she was 23 when they married. They had four children.

J. W. and Nancy Purdum initially lived in Brown County. By the time of the 1860 U.S. Census, the family had moved to Yates Township, just west of Fairbury. In 1869, John Turner Purdum, son of J. W. and Nancy Purdum, married Mary Jane Anderson. John Turner Purdum and Mary had three sons: William Purdum, John Leonard Purdum, and Charles Anderson "Charley" Purdum.

In 1887, at the age of 48, John Turner Purdum decided to retire from farming and move his family to Tulare, California. After moving to California, John Turner Purdum pursued his favorite hobby of fishing in the ocean. After spending a year in Tulare, John Turner Purdum decided to move to Santa Cruz, California.

On May 23, 1888, John Turner Purdum went ocean fishing with his friend Joel Smith. They traveled in a horse-drawn buggy on Mission Street down to the bay at Black Point. They hitched the horses and took their rods and lines to the point to fish. That day, the waves were much higher than usual. A colossal wave knocked 49-year-old John Turner Purdum into the ocean. Joel Smith recognized that the water was too treacherous for even an experienced swimmer to try to rescue Purdum. Joel Smith yelled at his friend to try to swim, but Purdum did not attempt to swim. John Turner Purdum yelled to his friend, "Tell my family goodbye!" and then he drowned.

The next day, Purdum's body was found when it washed onto the beach in the same area where he drowned. When John Turner Purdum died, his son,

Charley Purdum, was 17, and the other son, John L. Purdum, was eight. Mary Purdum was 51 when she became a widow.

Mary Purdum and her two sons moved from California to Bloomington after John Turner Purdum's death. Son Charley Purdum attended Illinois State Normal University for three years. The family then moved to Fairbury. Charley Purdum entered the grocery business with G. R. Farr in 1891. In 1893, Mary Purdum died of consumption at the age of 55 in Fairbury. In that era, consumption was the common name for tuberculosis.

Charley Purdum left the G. R. Farr business in 1894 to attend the Bryant & Stratton business college for one year. Also, in 1894, John W. Purdum died at the age of 75. He was buried in the Chenoa Cemetery.

In 1895, Charley Purdum bought the grocery business of W. J. O'Malley. In 1896, Charley Purdum married Ethel "Anita" Pence in Fairbury. Anita was in the Class of 1894 from Fairbury Township High School. Charley was 24, and Anita was 20 years of age when they married. Charley and Anita Purdum had two children. Charles Hugh "Chuck" Purdum was born in 1912, and Emily Elizabeth Purdum was born in 1917.

In 1898, the Blade published biographies of several promising young businesspeople in Fairbury. One of those biographies featured Charles A. "Charley" Purdum. The Blade story recounted his father drowning while sea fishing in California when Charley was just 17. The Blade reported that Charley had developed his grocery store into one of the best in the state.

After his grocery business career, Charley Purdum became the assistant cashier at the Walton Bank and later held the same position at the Fairbury Bank. In his last working years, he became engaged in the life insurance business. Charlie Purdum was an Indian Grove Supervisor and was on the Livingston County Board from 1939 to 1947.

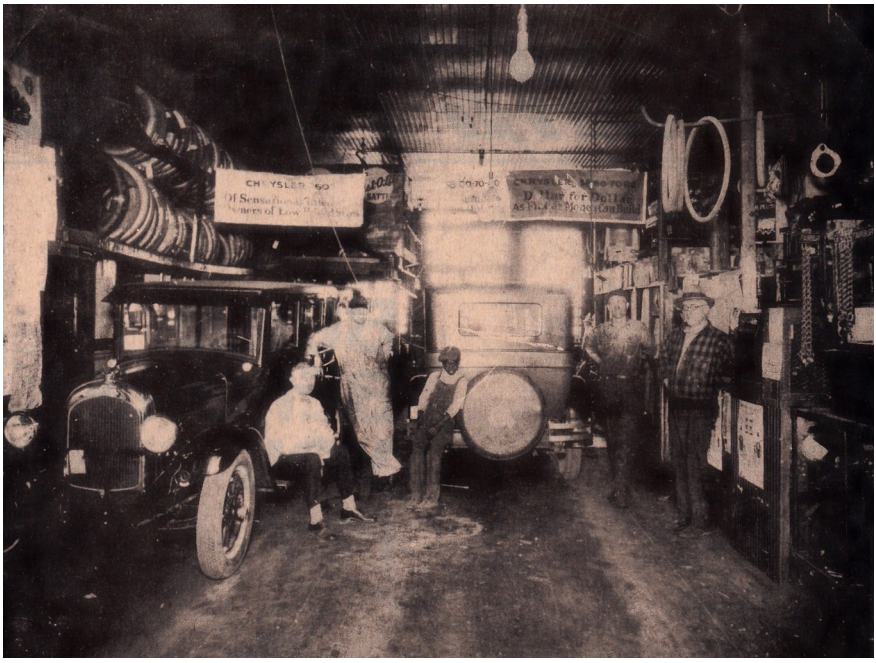
Charley Purdum's brother, John Purdum, graduated from the Fairbury Township High School with the Class of 1900. Jay Claudon was one of John's classmates. John Purdum then attended the Lake Forrest Academy. John returned to Fairbury and got started in the motorcycle business. John eventually ended up in the car dealership business.

In the 1910s, Fairbury was known as the motorcycle capital of the world. The first motorcycle club in Fairbury was established in 1910 by John L. Purdum. Carl Goudy established an Excelsior motorcycle dealership in Fairbury in this era. Carl Goudy and his brother William Goudy became world-class motorcycle racers and were inducted into the American Motorcycle Association Hall of Fame. The membership in this first motorcycle club peaked at 150 members. Several iconic photographs of large groups of motorcycles in Fairbury still survive today. This club closed out by 1919. After 25 years in the motorcycle and auto dealer businesses, John Purdum retired at the age of 48. He never married and died in 1939 at the age of 59.

In 1930, Chuck Purdum attended Illinois State Normal University and became a school teacher. Later in life, Chuck became a life insurance salesman. In 1939, Charles H. "Chuck" Purdum married Cleo Lucille Troehler. He was 27, and she was 24 years of age when they married. Chuck and Cleo Purdum had two daughters.

In 1940, Emily Purdum married Glenn Virgil Gibb. She was 22, and he was 26 when they married. In 1943, Chuck Purdum entered the U.S. Navy in World War II. He was discharged in 1946 as a Yeoman Third Class. Glenn and Emily moved to a farm north of Piper City in 1947 and then moved into Piper City in 1973. They had four children.

Chuck Purdum died in 1979 at the age of 67 and was buried in Graceland Cemetery. His obituary noted that he was a certified life insurance underwriter for Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company. He was also a World War II veteran. Chuck was very active in the community, including being the President of the Indian Creek Country Club, the Chairman of the Livingston County March of Dimes, and the President of the Fairbury PTA. Chuck belonged to the Lions Club, the American Legion Post, the Masonic Lodge, and the Chamber of Commerce. Cleo Purdum died in 1987 at the age of 72. She was buried with her husband in Graceland.



John Purdum's garage in the early 1900s in Fairbury. From left to right are Bert Monroe, Raymond Grover, William (Minno) Guthrie, Allen Beulley, and John Purdum, owner.

CHAPTER 69

Bobby Hankins' 1975 Fairbury Song

In the 1960s, Bobby Hankins was a country-western and gospel singer in Iowa. He also was a radio announcer in Oelwein, Iowa. This small town is about 250 miles northwest of Chicago. In 1975, Bobby Hankins released an LP album titled "Two Sides of Bobby Hankins." The last song on side two of this album is titled Fairbury, Illinois.

The story of how Bobby Hankins recorded this song about Fairbury begins with the birth in 1911 of Carl Herbert Friedrich Amelung in Blue Island, Illinois. Carl Amelung grew up in the Chicago area and then attended the Lutheran School in Hebron, Nebraska, to become a pastor. In 1937, Carl received his bachelor's degree at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio.

In 1938, Carl was assigned to be an assistant pastor at the Salem Lutheran Church in Detroit, Michigan. Two years later, he was appointed the Lutheran pastor serving the Chenoa and Fairbury congregations. About the same time he became the Chenoa and Fairbury Lutheran pastor, Carl married Esther Caroline Rakow.

During the nine years Pastor Carl Amelung served the Chenoa and Fairbury Lutheran congregations, his family grew to include daughter Carolyn Lillian Amelung and son John Edward Amelung. During his tenure as a Lutheran preacher, Pastor Carl performed many weddings in both Chenoa and Fairbury. Sometimes, daughter Carolyn Amelung served as the flower girl at these weddings.

In 1949, Pastor Carl Amelung was assigned to become the Lutheran Pastor in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The Amelung family moved from Fairbury to Fort Wayne. Their son Richard Carl Amelung was born two years after they arrived in Fort Wayne. All three Amelung children attended North Side High School in Fort Wayne. John Amelung was on the high school track and cross-country teams.

After finishing high school, John Amelung became a radio announcer. He worked in several different cities as a radio announcer.

In that era, Bobby Hankins was very active as a radio announcer and band performer. Mr. Hankins started with the Andy Dow show and established his own band. Bobby Hankins's teenage daughter, Dixie Lee Hankins, would often play in her father's bands. In 1967, Bobby Hankins released the LP record "The Country Sounds of Bobby Hankins." In 1968, Bobby Hankins released his second album, "Our Kind of Country," under White Lightning Records.

In 1970, Bobby Hankins moved his family from Oelwein, Iowa, to Coldwater, Michigan. Mr. Hankins began a long career as a radio announcer for WNWN in Coldwater and also ran a record store in the area.

In 1972, John Amelung became a radio announcer in Coldwater with Bobby Hankins. John Amelung likely met Bobby Hankins at Coldwater.

In 1975, Bobby Hankins released his third album titled "Two Sides of Bobby Hankins." The two sides referred to Bobby Hankins performing both country and gospel music. Side one of this album had five country songs, with daughter Dixie Lee being the lead vocalist on one of the songs. Side two of this album had six gospel songs, with the last piece titled "Fairbury, Illinois." On the album cover, the record company noted that Bobby Hankins' friend John Amelung had written the song about Fairbury.

The Fairbury song is just over three minutes long, and the lyrics include 275 words. In the piece, John Amelung recounts that he grew up in Fairbury and liked to listen to Preacher Carl in church. Amelung was referring to his father, Pastor Carl Amelung, preaching at both the Chenoa and Fairbury Lutheran churches.

Amelung recounted that when the Fairbury farmers had a dry year, they relied on their religious faith, which always seemed to pull them through hard times.

John Amelung recounted that as a boy in Fairbury, he stole watermelons and climbed the water tower. In the song, Amelung said he was 500 miles from Fairbury but was going to visit his hometown by train. Amelung also stated he wanted to get married in Fairbury, with his father officiating at

the wedding. John Amelung looked forward to raising his children in Fairbury.

In 1994, Bobby Hankins died in Michigan at the age of 64. His obituary noted that his Sunday radio show had been the most popular for the last twenty years.

In 2001, Pastor Carl Amelung died at age 89 in Fort Wayne, Indiana. After spending nine years in Fairbury, he spent the rest of his life in Fort Wayne.

As of 2024, Dixie Lee Hankins is still performing in bands in Texas. John Amelung lives in Florida.

The Fairbury, Illinois, song written by John Amelung and sung by Bobby Hankins is the only known song about Fairbury that was professionally released on a record album. The lyrics of the song have been transcribed and are available on the Fairbury Echoes Museum website. Citizens can visit the Fairbury Echoes Museum and listen to the CD recording of the Fairbury song. The Fairbury Echoes Museum is open on Thursdays and Fridays from one to four PM and on Saturdays from nine to eleven AM.

Cover of 1975 album recorded by Bobby Hankins with the song about Fairbury, Illinois.

CHAPTER 70

Fairbury Movies

Today, almost everyone has a smartphone that can record and make movies. Before the advent of smartphones, making movies required expensive cameras and training. Movies are an excellent method of documenting life in previous times.

Movies depicting typical Fairbury life were made in 1921 and 1937. Unfortunately, both of these two old movies have been lost. They were likely destroyed when the Third Street Opera House burned to the ground in 1952.

Watt Nakamaru recorded the oldest surviving movie depicting typical Fairbury life in about 1962. Watt worked for Honeggers and was also a photographer. Watt and his wife, Sonny, liked to play golf at the Indian Creek Golf Club.

Fairbury got its first swimming pool in 1958. This first pool was replaced by a second swimming pool in 1983. Watt filmed one minute at the old swimming pool. His film includes children using the diving board and the old swimming pool office at the north end of the complex.

In addition to being a photographer, Watt worked as a chicken sexer for Honeggers. In a 1982 Pantagraph article, Watt recounted that chicken sexing originated in Japan in the 1930s. He stated that chicken sexing seemed to be a specialty of Orientals as some Koreans can do the job. A chicken sexer's job is to determine the sex of the chickens when they are babies since the female of the species is more important than the male to egg producers.

Watt went to school in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, around 1952 and spent eight months learning how to handle the chickens. Watt could sort 1,000 to 1,200 chickens an hour with a 99 percent accuracy rate. Because he worked as a chicken sexer for the Honegger's Forrest Hatchery, Watt filmed about 15 minutes at that farm in Forrest. His footage includes the Honegger's airport with some of its distinctive red and white airplane fleet.

Since Watt and his wife spent a lot of time at the Indian Creek Golf Club, Watt recorded about 12 minutes of video at the golf course. His movies include scenes of golfers at the old clubhouse located at the south end of Fifth Street. This old clubhouse was replaced by the current building in 1968. Many Fairbury citizens recognize the golfers depicted in Watt's movie.

The Fairbury High School has conducted a Homecoming Parade down Locust Street for many years. The Homecoming Court usually rides in a convertible car. Watt captured this annual event with about one minute of film.

Descendants of Watt graciously donated his old movies to the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Fairbury Echoes Museum personnel uploaded Watt's videos to YouTube so anyone can view his old movies.

Dr. Pendergast (1879-1961) was an optometrist in Fairbury for many years. One of his unique hobbies was restoring and selling Cigar Store Indians. He became a nationally known expert on these figures and authored a book about their history. In 1942, a short movie clip under the Unusual Occupation series was made about Dr. Pendergast restoring his Cigar Store Indians.

Bob Hope was an entertainer famous for performing performances to entertain U.S. troops. Shortly before World War II ended in 1945, Bob did a show at a California hospital. Bob did an entertaining skit with Fairbury nurse Julia Flanagan during this show. The audio of this performance still exists today. Personnel from the Fairbury Echoes Museum combined the audio with historical information about Julia Flanagan and created a YouTube video documenting this event.

Honeggers was a significant company in Fairbury for many years. The firm had international operations, had close to 500 employees at its peak, was listed on the stock exchange, and had a corporate airplane fleet. They built and operated the vast feed mill that still stands just west of Fairbury. Their corporate office was in the former Illinois Hotel at the southwest corner of Second and Locust Streets. The corporate office also contained a restaurant, and it was painted in their distinctive red and white company

colors. In 1995, this three-story building was demolished. Fairbury's new City Hall was erected on this property. An unknown photographer recorded eight minutes of the demolition of the Honegger office building and restaurant in August 1995. This video has been converted to a YouTube video.

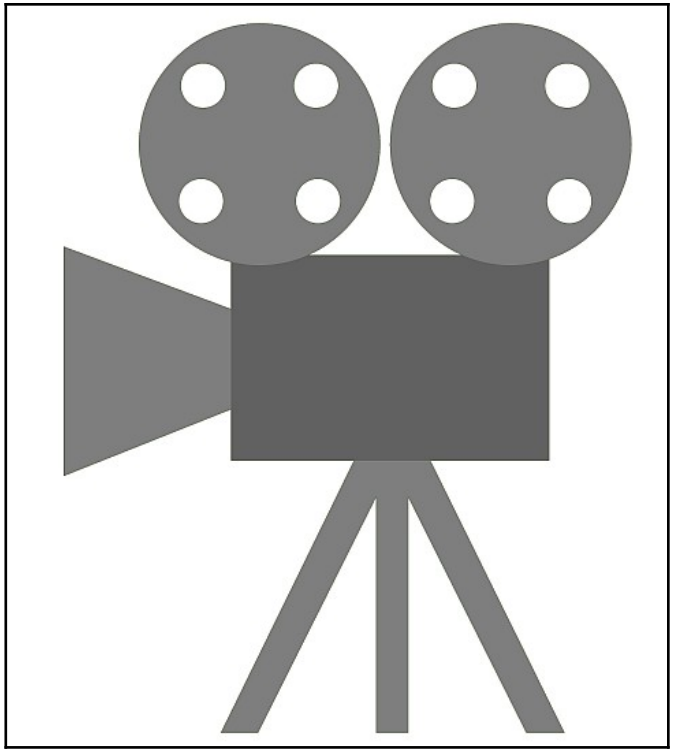
In 2015, Fairbury had three old building advertising signs that had faded over the years to become "ghost signs." The Fairbury Improvement Group decided to repaint these three historic signs. In 2016, the first of the three signs, the Occident Flour sign, was repainted at Second and Locust Streets' northeast corner. A two-minute video on YouTube documents how this sign was restored.

In 2016, Steve Tooley made a nine-minute YouTube video titled "***A Small Town Boy from Fairbury, Illinois.***" Steve's video includes aerial views of most of Fairbury's buildings and accurately documents the town's condition in 2016.

In 2023, a copy of a 2003 video about Fairbury was discovered. The Fairbury Economic Group made this video to help encourage people to move to Fairbury. It features many interviews with Fairbury citizens and shows how Fairbury looked in 2003. This video has been converted to a YouTube video.

Paul Garcia, a Fairbury native, made a video titled ***Small Town, Big Hearts: Falling in Love with Fairbury, IL.***, released in late 2023. Fairbury citizens have received this new video very well.

All of these surviving videos can be viewed on YouTube. Here is a link to the Fairbury Echoes Museum's website with links to each of these videos. Hopefully, with the advent of smartphones and YouTube, many more videos of typical Fairbury life will be created and preserved for posterity.



CHAPTER 71

Native American Woman Who Survived Trail of Tears May Be Buried at Spence Cemetery

James Spence (1797-1881) and his wife Susannah Spence (1803-1879) are buried in Spence Cemetery, south of Fairbury. Susannah was part Native American. Her mother, who was a full-blooded Native American, may also be buried in an unmarked grave in Spence Cemetery. Her mother walked the "Trail of Tears."

Wikipedia defines the "Trail of Tears" as an ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of approximately 60,000 people of the "Five Civilized Tribes" between 1830 and 1850 by the United States government. As part of the Indian removal, members of the Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw nations were forcibly removed from their ancestral homelands in the Southeastern United States to newly designated Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River after the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830. The Cherokee removal in 1838 (the last forced removal east of the Mississippi) was brought on by the discovery of gold near Dahlonega, Georgia, in 1828, resulting in the Georgia Gold Rush.

Elizabeth Pridmore Aquatake Quatie Rishton was born in the Cherokee Territory of Alabama in 1755. Genealogy researchers disagree on whether Elizabeth was in the Chickasaw or Cherokee tribe. Ancestry.com lists her parents as Joshua Rishton (1730-1837) and Alice Royston (1728-1780). No evidence could be found that either Joshua or Alice were Native American. It is possible that Joshua and Alice Rishton adopted Elizabeth.

Malachi Spence was born in North Carolina in 1769. Later, he and his family would be some of the first white settlers in the Fairbury area.

In 1775, Elizabeth Rishton married John C. "Jack" Callahan in Alabama. Elizabeth and Jack had four children. Jack's parents were Edward "Red Ned" Callahan and Mahala Susanna "White Deer" Unegahiwiya "Sukey" Brock Callahan. Jack's maternal grandparents were both Native Americans.

Courtney A. Hubbard was born in 1779 in Maryland. In 1796, Courtney married Malachi Spence in North Carolina. Malachi was 27, and Courtney was 17 years old when they married. They had nine children. One of the children of Malachi and Courtney Spence was James Spence, born in North Carolina in 1797. The Malachi Spence family moved to Madison County, Kentucky, around 1800.

In 1803, Susannah Rishton Callahan was born in Madison County, KY. Her parents were Jack Callahan and Elizabeth Rishton. If her father, Jack, was 50% Native American and her mother, Elizabeth, was 100% Native American, Susannah would have been 75% Native American.

Wikipedia recounts that the Battle of Tippecanoe was fought on November 7, 1811, in Battle Ground, Indiana, between American forces led by then Governor William Henry Harrison of the Indiana Territory and Native American forces associated with Shawnee leader Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa (commonly known as "The Prophet"). These two brothers were leaders of a confederacy of various tribes who opposed the European-American settlement of the American frontier. As tensions and violence increased, Governor Harrison marched with an army of about 1,000 men to attack the confederacy's headquarters at Prophetstown, near the confluence of the Tippecanoe River and the Wabash River.

Harrison accomplished his goal of destroying Prophetstown. The win proved decisive and garnered Harrison the nickname of "Tippecanoe ." Meanwhile, the defeat dealt a fatal blow to Tecumseh's confederacy, and though comeback attempts were made, it never fully recovered. Harrison's nickname was so popular that the Whigs turned "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" into the slogan and a popular song for Harrison and his running mate John Tyler's 1840 presidential campaign.

Jack Callahan was killed at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. His widow, Elizabeth Callahan, was 56 years old when her husband was killed.

In 1819, James Spence married Susannah Rishton Callahan in Madison County, Kentucky. James was 21, and Susannah was 16 when they married. They had 16 children. Nine of their children were born in Kentucky, and seven were born in Indian Grove Township.

In the 1820 Census, Elizabeth Callahan lived in Madison County, Kentucky. Elizabeth could not be found in the 1830 U.S. Census.

Valentine Darnall was the first white settler in Livingston County in 1830. Two years later, the Malachi Spence family moved from Kentucky to a farm south of Fairbury. Malachi's son, James Spence, also emigrated from Kentucky to Fairbury.

The five tribes were forced to move from the southeast to the Indian Territory west of Arkansas and relocated in different years. In 1831, the Choctaw became the first Nation to be removed, and their removal served as the model for all future relocations. After two wars, many Seminoles were removed in 1832. The Creek removal followed in 1834, the Chickasaw in 1837, and the Cherokee in 1838.

Several written reports from descendants of Elizabeth Callahan suggest that she was forced to march in The Trail of Tears around 1838. Elizabeth would have been 83 years old when she was forced to walk from Georgia to the Indian Territory. Some of her descendants report that she became ill on the trip and stayed at one of her daughter's homes in Missouri. In the 1840 Census, a person named Elizabeth Callahan lived in Fleming, Kentucky.

It is possible that Elizabeth Callahan then went to live with her daughter, Susannah Spence, who lived south of Fairbury. There are reports that Elizabeth Callahan died in 1850 at the age of 95 and was buried in an unmarked grave in Spence Cemetery, south of Fairbury.

Susannah Spence died in 1879 at the age of 76, and her husband, James Spence, died in 1881 at the age of 83. Both are buried in the Spence Cemetery.

In 1906, Congress passed a law to compensate Cherokee Native Americans forced to leave their homes when the United States broke a treaty. Guion Miller, a special agent of the Interior Department, was tasked with compiling a roll of eligible persons.

The children and grandchildren of Elizabeth Callahan filed several claims with Mr. Miller. These claims stated that Elizabeth was a Native American and was forced to leave her home during the Trail of Tears forced marches. Copies of these claims are still available today.

In 1983, Erma D. Stuckey published a massive book with the histories of the Darnall, Spence, Steers, Spangler, Stuckey, and Sill families. In this book, Erma noted that Susannah Callahan, wife of James Spence, was "part Indian." James and Susannah Spence are buried in Spence Cemetery.

Several questions about Elizabeth Callahan remain unanswered. Who were her Native American parents? Was she born in the Chickasaw or Cherokee tribe? Was she forced to march in the Trail of Tears? Was she buried in an unmarked grave in Spence Cemetery, close to her daughter Susannah Spence?

Some of the many descendants of the James and Susannah Spence family likely still live in the Fairbury area. Since Susannah Spence was part Native American, all of her descendants are genetically part Native American.

Hopefully, someday, more answers will be found about the fascinating life of Elizabeth Pridmore Aquatake Quatie Rishton-Callahan.

The older woman is Elizabeth Callahan. She was a Native American who was forced to march in the Trail of Tears and may be buried in Spence Cemetery in an unmarked grave. The younger girl is likely one of her granddaughters.

CHAPTER 72

The Eppards Point Weather Prophet

For thousands of years, farmers have dreamed of having long-term weather forecasts that would help improve their farming operations. In 2024, the best a weather forecaster can predict is three days with reasonable accuracy. In 1904, Fairbury area farmer Benjamin Franklin "Frank" Bradbury thought he could develop accurate weather forecasts for 30 days into the future.

The story of the Frank Bradbury family began with William L. Bradbury's birth in 1776 in New Hampshire. In 1805, William married Sarah "Sally" Lunt in Massachusetts. William was 28, and Sarah was 34 when they married. They had four children. One of their children was Joseph Sanders Bradbury, born in 1811 in New Hampshire.

Joseph S. Bradbury grew up in New Hampshire but decided to move to New York City and learn the printing trade. Joseph went to work at a printer's shop to learn the trade, and one of his classmates was Horace Greeley (1811-1872). Horace Greeley became one of the most famous newspapermen in America.

After learning the printing trade, Joseph S. Bradbury and his older brother, William Lunt Bradbury, published the New York Sun newspaper. In 1838, Joseph married Marcena Lunt in Massachusetts. He was 26, and she was 24 when they married. They were first cousins, and they had 12 children. Studies have shown that married first cousins are somewhat more likely than unrelated parents to have a child with a severe birth defect, mental retardation, or genetic disease. It is now illegal for first cousins to marry in Illinois unless both people are over 50.

Around 1845, an epidemic of smallpox broke out in New York City. William L. Bradbury, Joseph S. Bradbury's older brother, died of smallpox at the age of 40. Joseph was 34 when his brother died. Joseph continued to publish the Sun newspaper by himself for several years.

Joseph S. Bradbury started experiencing a medical problem with his eyes in 1848. His doctor advised him to sell his New York business interests and seek an outdoor life in a milder climate. He followed his doctor's advice and moved to Wheeling, West Virginia, where he became engaged in the lumber business.

Joseph S. Bradbury's medical condition improved in West Virginia. He decided to move to Peoria County and become a farmer. In 1850, the family moved from West Virginia to Peoria County, and Joseph became a farmer. Joseph and Marcena had a son in Peoria County in 1857 named Benjamin Franklin "Frank" Bradbury. He was the eleventh of twelve children born to Joseph and Marcena.

In 1869, the Joseph S. Bradbury family moved from Peoria County to Eppards Point Township, just west of Fairbury. They settled on an 80-acre farm in the northeast corner of Section 36. Frank Bradbury was 12 years old when his family moved to Eppards Point.

Frank Bradbury attended District Number 87 Lakeside Country School. It was named Lakeside because there used to be a small pond just southwest of the school building. The old wooden country school building still stands, but the pond has been drained. In the 1870s, farm boys typically attended country school until they finished the sixth grade. They then quit their schooling and helped their father on the family farm. It was highly unusual for a boy to finish high school in that era.

Around 1875, Frank completed high school in either Fairbury or Pontiac. Frank then attended Eureka College for at least two years and became qualified to be a school teacher. Frank Bradbury held certificates to teach first and second grade. Frank Bradbury became a school teacher for a few years, likely at the Lakeside Country School.

In 1880, Joseph S. Bradbury, Frank Bradbury's father, died at the age of 68. Eighteen months later, Frank Bradbury's mother also died. After his father's death, Frank Bradbury took over farming the 80-acre family farm

and stopped teaching. He later served as a Director for the Lakeside Country School for many years.

Frank Bradbury was an avid reader and always liked learning about new topics. In 1880, Frank Benjamin formed the Lakeside Literary Club, which he likely named after the Lakeside country school near his farm.

On October 3, 1884, the Pontiac Sentinel published an article announcing the Lakeside Literary Society would give a dramatic and literary entertainment program at the Lakeside schoolhouse. Admission was 25 cents, and the proceeds would be devoted to the society's expenses. The entertainment program must have failed because the Lakeside Literary Society ceased operations in 1884.

The group's closure deeply saddened Frank, and he drew an elaborate illustration of a memorial monument for the Lakeside Literary Society. Frank noted that the society was born in 1880 and died in 1884 of exhaustion and old age. A handwritten journal from the Lakeside Literary Club was recently donated to the Fairbury Echoes Museum. The journal contains the date of 1884.

In October of 1886, the Pontiac Sentinel reported that a jury determined that Jennie L. Bradbury, an older sister of Benjamin Bradbury, was legally insane and a pauper at the age of 36. She was eventually sent to the Illinois Eastern Hospital for the Insane in Kankakee. She died in this institution in 1926 at the age of 76.

When Benjamin was not occupied farming his 80-acre farm, he devoted himself to educating himself. He spent a lot of time studying foreign languages and many of the higher and technical branches of science. Benjamin came up with the idea of using principles of astronomy, geography, and meteorology to prepare an “astro-geographical chart” that he could use to make 30-day weather forecasts.

On May 3, 1904, the Pontiac Sentinel newspaper published an article titled “Bradbury’s Weather Forecast." The article noted that Bradbury was a farmer living near Fairbury and had become quite prominent for his weather forecasts. The Sentinel published Bradbury's daily weather forecast for May. For each day of the month, Bradbury predicted whether it would be warm, cool, rainy, cloudy, windy, or have frost. Benjamin was 47 when his first weather prediction was published in the Sentinel.

The Sentinel published a second Bradbury weather forecast for September in August 1904. In October 1905, the Sentinel published a story about Frank Bradbury, the "Eppards Point Weather Prophet," who was involved in a runaway horse accident on his farm.

Frank Bradbury died on his farm in 1919 at the age of 61. His dead body was discovered by his neighbors when he had not been heard from for several days. Benjamin Franklin Bradbury was buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery. In October of 1920, the Pontiac Daily Leader published an article recounting that the 80-acre farm of B. F. Bradbury, located three and a half miles south of McDowell, had been sold for $360 an acre to G. E. Ulfers. This price would equal $5,585 an acre in today’s dollars.

Only a few physical items document the fascinating life of Frank Bradbury. His old Lakeside country school house still stands. A photograph of Frank Bradbury by Fairbury photographer E. M. Phillips survives, and a photograph of his barn. Frank's hand-drawn elaborate illustration of a memorial monument for the Lakeside Literary Society also survives. The 1884 handwritten journal from the Lakeside Literary Club also survives. These old photographs and the journal were recently donated to the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Frank's 30-day weather forecasts for May and September 1904 are recorded in the Pontiac Daily Leader archive editions.

Frank Bradbury was a highly educated bachelor who enjoyed learning new things. In the early 1900s, he became well-known in Livingston County as the Eppards Point Weather Prophet.

Digitally colorized photograph of the Eppards Point Weather Prophet Frank Bradbury circa 1887.

Frank Bradbury was very sad when his literary group was disbanded. He drew this illustration about the life and death of his literary group.

CHAPTER 73

1959 Murder of Lela Colwell

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to Indiana. In the almost 170 years since Fairbury was established, eight murders have been committed. Chronologically, Lela Colwell was the seventh murder victim in 1959 in Fairbury.

The man convicted of murdering Lela Colwell was Roy Bennett. Roy was born in 1911 to parents Elmer Bennett (1873-1932) and Rebecca L. Tubbs (1875-1951). Elmer was 21, and Rebecca was 19 when they married. They had 13 children. Elmer Bennett followed the trade of blacksmith and machinist.

Roy Bennett never married. In the 1920 U.S. Census, Roy was nine years old and lived with his parents and siblings in Pleasant Ridge Township. In the 1930 Census, Roy was 19 years old and lived with his parents and two siblings in Fairbury at 613 E. Locust Street. Roy's occupation was as a farm laborer.

In 1932, Elmer Bennett, Roy Bennett's father, died at the age of 58 and was buried in the Pleasant Ridge Cemetery. Roy Bennett was 21 when his father died.

In the 1940 Census, Roy was 29 years old and lived with his mother in Indian Grove Township. Roy's brother, Albert Bennett, was 24 and lived in the household. Roy reported that the highest grade he completed was in the eighth grade. Roy Bennett reported his occupation as a farm laborer.

By the time of the 1950 Census, Roy Bennett was a 39-year-old hired farmhand living with the Addis and Kathleen Liddle family in Avoca Township. Roy reported that the sixth grade was the highest school level he achieved.

John Colwell (1865-1936) was born in England. He emigrated to Fairbury to work as a miner in the town's coal mines. Around 1885, John Colwell married Hannah "Fannie" Cumpston in Fairbury. John was 20, and Fannie

was 22 when they married. Their only child was Lela Florence Colwell, born in 1895 in Fairbury.

Lela Colwell never married. Her mother died in 1932, and her father died in 1936. In the 1940 U.S. Census, Lela was 45 years old and lived alone at 210 West Maple Street in Fairbury. She reported owning her house and completing her second year of high school.

In the 1950 U.S. Census, Lela was 56 years old and lived at 201 West Ash in Fairbury. She reported that her occupation was babysitting and keeping the house for a private family.

Roy Bennett first met Lela Colwell around 1955 when he was collecting trash in the alley by Lela's house. Roy later recounted that Miss Colwell spoke to him first and was " friendly." Roy also said that Miss Colwell was the only female who had ever spoken to him in a friendly manner.

In August of 1959, most Fairbury residents eagerly awaited the start of the Fairbury Fair in the week of August 24th. At that time, Lela Colwell was 64 years old and lived at her house at the southwest corner of Ash and Second Streets. On Tuesday, August 25th, Lela Colwell walked from her home to the Fairbury Fair.

In August of 1959, Roy Bennett was 48 years of age. At his murder trial, Roy testified that he had only completed the fourth grade. Roy also testified that he began drinking wine when he was about 19 years of age. Roy recounted spending most of his time in Fairbury bars and repeatedly heard patrons say Miss Colwell "was an easy mark for a man." Over the years, Roy Bennett had been convicted of various minor crimes.

On the day of the murder, Roy drank three bottles of wine, each one-fifth in volume. He then took another bottle of wine with him and decided to go to Lela's house and wait for her to return from the Fairbury Fair.

When Lela returned to her house, Roy Bennett asked her if she would have sexual relations with him. When Lela declined, Roy Bennett attacked her. He hit Lela twice on her head with the wine bottle. Roy Bennett struck her so hard that the wine bottle broke. Mr. Bennett took a broken piece of the wine bottle glass and tried to slit the throat of Lela Colwell.

A neighbor of Lela Colwell, Mrs. Lloyd Zimmerman, saw something unusual at Lela's house: an unsteady figure standing on the porch. She contacted her husband, and the police were contacted. When the police arrived at around nine p.m. at Lela's house, they found Roy Bennett and Lela Colwell. Miss Colwell was barely alive and was rushed to Fairbury Hospital.

Roy Bennett admitted to the police that he had attacked Lela Colwell. The next day, he re-enacted the crime for police officials at Lela's house. A Fairbury Blade photographer took pictures of him re-enacting the crime for police officials, which were then published in the Blade.

Roy Bennett was guilty of two counts. These counts were assault to commit murder and assault to commit rape. After his murder trial, Roy Bennett stated that he was sorry for what he had done to the people of his town and for what he did to Lela. Circuit Judge Hubert H. Edwards then sentenced Roy Bennett to 18 to 20 years in the State Penitentiary at Joliet.

Roy Bennett's attack on Lela Colwell with the broken wine bottle glass almost separated her head from her body. She also had extensive brain damage from being struck so hard by the wine bottle. She required round-the-clock medical attention at the Fairbury Hospital. After suffering for 11 months after the attack, she died on July 12th, 1960, in the Fairbury Hospital. She was buried with her parents at Graceland Cemetery in Fairbury. Her house was sold at auction a few months after she died.

If Roy Bennett had served 18 years in prison after committing the crime in 1959, he would have been released in 1977. Roy Bennett died in 1974 in Pontiac at the age of 63. He was buried in Graceland Cemetery.

In the other seven murders that have been committed in Fairbury, all of the victims died either immediately or within a couple of days of the incident. Lela Colwell suffered for eleven months after the attack by Roy Bennett before she finally died.

2015 photo of the house at the southwest corner of Ash and Second Streets in Fairbury where Lela Colwell was murdered by Roy Bennett during the Fairbury Fair week in 1959.

CHAPTER 74

History of Cooper Cemetery

Cooper Cemetery is a small cemetery about seven miles southwest of Fairbury. Over 300 people have been buried in this cemetery, which is also the final resting place of many early settlers south of Fairbury. The oldest adult gravestone dates back to 1840.

The story of this cemetery began with the initial purchase of the farmland from the U.S. Government. On January 19, 1846, Jonathan Moore (1816-1850) purchased the 160 acres in the southwest quarter of Section 29 in Indian Grove township. Jonathan Moore was one of the sons of Jonathan J. Moore and Sarah Patterson. He was born in North Carolina before the family moved to Overton County, Tennessee.

Valentine and Rachael Darnall became the first white settlers in Livingston County in 1830. They built a log cabin south of Fairbury.

One year later, in 1831, the Jonathan J. Moore family members started to emigrate from Overton County, Tennessee, to farms south of Fairbury. Several sons, including Jonathan Moore, came at the same time. In 1842, Jonathan Moore married Margaret Popejoy (1826-1850) in Livingston County. She was born in Ohio. He was 26, and she was 16 when they married. They had three children.

The California Gold Rush started in 1848 when gold was discovered at Sutter's Creek. Jonathan Moore caught the gold bug and began to travel west to California to seek his fortune. Unfortunately, he died at the age of 33 in Laramie, Wyoming, on his way to California. Just four months later, his wife, Margaret, died at the age of 24 in Indian Grove Township.

Cooper Cemetery is named after James Cooper. He was born in 1809 in North Carolina and married Susanna M. Travis (1808-1867) in 1830 in Tennessee. At the time of their marriage, he was 21, and she was 22. James and Susanna Cooper had seven children.

In 1832, James and Susanna Cooper had twin sons named Jeremiah Franklin "Frank" Cooper and James Madison Cooper. They were born in Overton County, Tennessee. In 1834, James and Susanna Cooper moved their family from Tennessee to Belle Prairie township south of Fairbury. Their mode of transportation was by a wagon drawn by oxen, which made their travel necessarily slow. The average daily distance traveled by an oxen-drawn wagon was about 13 miles per day. It likely took them about 35 days to make the 450-mile journey from Overton County to Fairbury. When they arrived, they built a log cabin and settled in Section Five of Belle Prairie Township. Frank Cooper would have been two years old when his family made the long journey.

Shortly after arriving in Belle Prairie Township, James and Susanna Cooper had a daughter, Margaret Cooper, born on November 27, 1834. Margaret Cooper was the first white child born in what is now Belle Prairie Township.

When he was six years old, around 1838, Frank Cooper started attending country school. His first school was a log cabin with a big fireplace, puncheon floor, and hewed board seats.

In his later years, Frank Cooper recounted that when his family first arrived south of Fairbury, there were only four other families in his early recollection. They lived at the "Grove" and were Uncle Barney Phillips and family, Uncle Martin Darnall and family, the first white settler, James Spence and brothers, and Richard Moore and family. During winter, snow would drift through the cracks in their log cabins. The food was homemade, and jeans furnished the only outside-wearing apparel, while underclothing, overcoats, and overshoes were unknown. Despite this, there was not much sickness, a little ague now and then, but doctors and medicines were almost unknown. Bloomington, Ottawa, and Chicago were the trading points. A trip to one of these points was made about once a year, chiefly to procure salt.

In 1840, the first burial of an adult took place in Cooper Cemetery. This grave was for Elizabeth Right Harp – Moore (1801-1840), per the FindaGrave.com website.

Livingston County was created in 1837. No trials were held until 1840. The first case ever held in Livingston County was in 1840. William Popejoy asked Isaac Wilson if he could rent his horse for a trip to Bloomington and back. Mr. Popejoy agreed to care for, feed and shod the horse, plus pay Mr. Wilson $1. Mr. Popejoy made the trip to Bloomington and returned the horse to Mr. Wilson. Unfortunately, the horse died soon after it was returned home. Mr. Wilson sued Mr. Popejoy and alleged that Mr. Popejoy had not taken proper care of his horse and requested $300 in damages. Mr. Popejoy retained 31-year-old Abraham Lincoln as his attorney. Isaac Wilson retained Stephen A. Douglas as his attorney. William Popejoy is the third great-grandfather of Ray Popejoy, founder of Popejoy Plumbing, Heating, Electric, and Geothermal company in Fairbury.

From a legal standpoint, Abe Lincoln lost the case, but he got the damages significantly reduced that Mr. Popejoy had to pay Mr. Wilson. Since Livingston County was founded in 1837, no permanent courthouse had been built by 1840. The court hearings were held in a cabin owned by Henry Weed. The jury deliberated on a pile of sawn logs on the banks of the Vermilion River in Pontiac. James Cooper served on this jury.

Mr. Cooper was a mechanic and farmer and, for some years, bore the reputation of being the best hand with the broad axe in the county. He made many chairs, spinning wheels, and looms, which he sold to his neighbors. Many of the chairs he made were still used when the 1909 Livingston County history book was written.

In 1847, James Cooper took his son, Frank Cooper, on a Chicago trip. The little town of Chicago looked big to them and was already a trading center, even though no railroads were in Chicago yet. The chief hotels were the Sherman House and the American Temperance House. Mr. Cooper and his father camped on the streets in their covered wagon, as did hundreds of others trading in Chicago.

In 1853, Frank Cooper married Eliza Louisa Davis (1837-1906). She was born in Indiana. He was 21, and she was 16 when they married in Livingston County. They had 15 children. In 1864, Frank and Eliza Cooper settled on a farm in Section 29 of Indian Grove Township. They built a log cabin. He owned 125 acres valued at $5,000 in 1878. That

amount would be equivalent to $160,500 in today's dollars. Frank served as director of the country school in his area for many years.

Eliza Cooper, Frank Cooper's wife, died in 1867 at the age of 57. Two years later, in 1869, Frank Cooper married Nancy Margaret Williams. In 1870, pioneer settler James Cooper died at the age of 60. The 1909 Livingston County history book noted that James Cooper was buried in the cemetery that bore his name, the Cooper Cemetery. By the time of the 1893 Atlas, Jonathan Moore had died, and Frank Cooper owned the land just west of the Cooper Cemetery.

In 1906, Eliza Cooper, wife of Frank Cooper, died at the age of 68 and was buried in Cooper Cemetery. Frank Cooper married Mrs. Jennie Travis one year later, on October 30, 1907. Frank Cooper then moved to Fairbury. The 1909 Livingston County history book reported that in his later years, Frank Cooper took an interest in the temperance movement that led him to act with the Prohibition Party. Frank Cooper took a radical stand on the question of temperance by protesting that no man should be licensed to sell that which injures his fellow man.

In 1914, Frank Cooper was 81 years of age. One day, he ate lunch at home and then walked up to Main Street to get a shave. After getting a shave, Frank went to the Mapel Bros. Harness store, where Once N Again is now located. He sat in a chair in the harness shop and visited with Mr. Sype until he suddenly experienced a massive heart attack. Frank Cooper died in the harness shop chair. He was buried in Cooper Cemetery.

John "Granville" Masterson (1900-1967) was born in Belle Prairie Township and lived in Fairbury in his later years. Granville Masterson was one of the trustees of the Cooper Cemetery. In Blade articles in 1946 and 1951, Granville referred to the Frank Cooper Cemetery instead of Cooper Cemetery. Granville Masterson likely knew Frank Cooper, and he knew that in his early years, he lived next door to the cemetery. Granville mistakenly thought the cemetery was named after Frank Cooper when it was really named after his father, James Cooper (1832-1870).

In the 1970s, Mary Peterson Erickson and several friends of yours went to every cemetery in Livingston County and recorded the information on the gravestones. She published her results in two volumes titled Livingston

County Cemetery Records. In 1979, they visited Cooper Cemetery and recorded 315 people buried in marked graves in the cemetery. Copies of her books are available at the Dominy Memorial Library.

The FindaGrave.com website reports that 355 people are currently buried in Cooper Cemetery. This relatively old cemetery traces back to pioneer settler James Cooper, who arrived south of Fairbury in 1834. The cemetery has many old gravestones dating back to the 1840s.

Cooper Cemetery is located about seven miles southwest of Fairbury.

Recommended Reading

Stuffed Clubs and Antimacassars by Alma Lewis James.

Other Fairbury History Books by Dale C. Maley……

The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois

Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War

Fairbury, Illinois, in the World Wars

Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois

Fairbury, Illinois Book Authors

Fairbury, Illinois in 1888

Fairbury, Illinois, from Prehistoric to Modern Times

Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Columbian Exposition

William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois

William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields

Author Spotlight

Dale C. Maley

Dale C. Maley is President of the Livingston County Historical Society and Vice-President of the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Dale is an expert on Fairbury, Illinois, history and has written over 120 newspaper articles and more than 20 books about Fairbury history. Both Dale and his wife are 5th generation citizens of Fairbury.

Also by Dale C. Maley

Fairbury and Livingston County History Books

- Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois
- Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition
- Fairbury History Stories Volume 1
- Fairbury, Illinois from Prehistoric to Modern Times

- Fairbury, Illinois in 1888
- Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War
- Fairbury, Illinois in the World Wars
- Franklin Oliver: Pioneer Settler of Livingston County, Illinois
- History of Murders Committed in Fairbury, Illinois

- Honegger's & Co. of Fairbury, Illinois
- Livingston County Historical Society: It's Beginning and Some Later Years with Updates
- The Great Chatsworth Train Wreck of 1887
- The Founding of Fairbury, Illinois
- The Goudy Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois
- The Kring Family of Fairbury, Illinois
- The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois
- Walton Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois

- William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois
- William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields

Woodworking Books

- How to Build a Fascinating Ratcheting Wood Model
- How to Make a Simple Hopping Bunny Rabbit Pull-Toy

Investing Books

- Index Mutual Funds: How to Simplify Your Financial Life and Beat the Pro's
- How Asset Allocation Can Help You Achieve Your Financial Goals
- Frequently Asked Questions & Answers about ETF's and Index Funds
- Why We Don't Save Enough for Retirement and How You Can Save More
- Are You Using the Right Rules to Plan Your Retirement?
- How to Use Psychology to Achieve Your Financial Goals
- Should Immediate Annuities Be a Tool in Your Retirement Planning Toolbox?
- Who Wins the Variable Annuity Versus Mutual Fund Battle?
- Will Your Children or Uncle Sam Inherit Your Estate?
- What Are the Requirements for Becoming a Financial Planner?
- Sell My Stocks Before the Baby Boomers Crash the Market?
- How Do I Determine If I Have Saved Enough to Retire?
- Don't Max Out My 401K?
- Will Reverse Mortgages Be the Salvation of Baby Boomer Retirees?

- Do I Need Ten, Twenty, or Thirty Times My Income to Retire?
- How to Find a Good Financial Planner
- Total Market or Slice-n-Dice for My Investment Portfolio?
- What Safety Factor Are You Using for Your Retirement Plan?
- How Much Income Do I Really Need in Retirement?
- What Lessons Can We Learn from the Crash of 2008?
- How to Invest for Retirement after the Crash of 2008
- Rules-of-thumb or Retirement Planning Software?
- Is Portfolio Rebalancing Worth It?
- Do I Need Umbrella Insurance?
- Got My First Job and How Do I Handle the 401K?
- Are Black Swans Really Harmful to Ordinary Investors?
- Should My Asset Allocation Include My Pension and Social Security?
- Should I Pay Off My Mortgage Early?
- How Does My Asset Allocation Compare to Everyone Else?
- How Do I Maximize Retirement Income From My Portfolio?
- Is Saving 10% of My Gross Income Good Enough?

- Contribute to My Bad 401K or Go Taxable?
- Do I Need an Investment Policy Statement?
- Do I Need Long-Term Care Insurance?
- Do I Need Long-Term Disability Insurance?
- How to Read Your Way to Financial Wealth
- How Do I Select the Correct Risk Level for My Portfolio?
- How Do I Estimate Retirement Living Expenses?